David The Son of Jesse

Marjorie Strachey

Presented to cadet, C. W. Hall
for excellent work in Bible
History.

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D. L. W. A.

DAVID
THE SON OF JESSE

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BY
MARJORIE STRACHEY

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TO THE READER

This book has three sources: the Bible, the critics, and my own imagination. I have used whichever seemed to suit me best for each episode, and have sometimes blended all three together

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Book I

THE SON OF JESSE

"He shall give his angels charge over thee, to keep thee in all thy ways; they shall bear thee up in their hands lest thou dash thy foot against a stone."—Ps. xci, 11, 12.

PART I

AT SAUL'S COURT

Chapter I

SAMUEL was certainly getting to be an old man. He had been on his ass only an hour, and the sun was still low in the sky, yet already he was feeling stiff and hot, and the thought that Saul might be close on his track was unpleasantly insistent. He groaned and halted the ass. Elihu, who was driving the cow, halted too.

"Elihu," said Samuel.

"My lord," replied the man, flicking away an insect from the cow's flank.

"You say you know this man Jesse yourself."

"My father was his servant, and as a child I lived in his house."

"Yes; you told me so."

"Many times, foolish old man," muttered Elihu to himself, crossly, but softly, "but you don't attend to what I say, and forget it the next minute."

Elihu was annoyed with his master. He saw

no sense in making this journey to Bethlehem just when the hot weather was beginning to be disagreeable. "Dragging a cow, too," he grumbled; "as if there were not enough cows in Bethlehem, that we must drag the beast along the stony road, past the stronghold of the Jebusites, too, who would as soon cut our throats for the sake of a cow as reap any harvest they had not sown."

Samuel had apparently been plunged in thought. He now looked up and said:

"We had better not delay here—"

"I could have told you that," grunted Elihu in an undertone.

"We are too near Jerusalem. When we are safely past it I will get down and walk, for this ass has an uneasy movement, and galls me."

"So would anything, short of a litter," mumbled Elihu, shoving the cow on again.

"What did you say?" and Elihu suddenly found a pair of piercingly bright blue eyes, overhung by thick white eyebrows, fixed motionless upon his. It was a horrible moment. He gasped for breath, licked his lips, and answered with a stammer:

"Only—only—my lord—that the ass would need some litter when we got to Bethlehem."

Samuel laughed, and took his eyes off Elihu, who breathed again.

They were now passing under the rocky cliffs on which was perched Jerusalem, and cow and ass were hit and prodded as an encouragement to make the best of their speed. Half a mile beyond the town Samuel stopped, and with many groans and lurches heaved himself off the ass, and proceeded slowly on foot.

"As regards Jesse—" said Elihu, presently, in a tentative voice.

"Well?" said the Prophet.

"When you were in Bethlehem last you did not visit him, did you?"

"What should I visit him for?"

"You seem interested in him, now."

"Interested? I am only going to make a sacrifice for his house—there is nothing remarkable in that."

"Nothing remarkable—oh, no—nothing remarkable in pushing a cow all the way from Ramah to Bethlehem—twenty miles if it's a step—in the hot weather, too. Don't you think *Saul* would think it remarkable if *he* heard of it?" Elihu's disgust and vexation had got the better of his discretion, and he felt that he must say what he thought, or burst.

"I am afraid," said Samuel, coldly, "that neither you nor Saul quite understand the ways of the Lord," and Elihu was silenced again.

It was not long before they came to a grove of

trees by the wayside with a tall stone standing among them. The grove presented a curious sight, for from all the branches hung, dancing and quivering in the light breeze, innumerable rags, of all colors and lengths. Elihu had provided himself and his master with what was required, and pulling two pieces of linen from his girdle he handed one to Samuel, and tied the other to a branch within convenient reach. Samuel's long arms stretched above his head seemed an age in awkwardly attaching his rag to the sacred tree. At last they sank by his side; he turned to his servant, who was standing still with an obviously assumed air of infinite patience, and said slowly:

"Elihu, you can wait here; I am going over there"—pointing vaguely eastward—"and I may be away some time. See that the ass and cow do not stray"; and with these words he stepped out of the grove, leaving Elihu staring after him, open-mouthed.

"Mad; mad beyond a doubt," was his conclusion. "The Lord be praised the fit did not seize him till we had reached the shade of the sacred grove; there at least one can sleep at one's ease"; and in a few moments the ass and the cow were tethered and Elihu was on his back, snoring.

Directly Samuel was out of the shadow of the

trees he took hold of the long cotton gown which hung to his ankles and pulled it up through his leather belt till his legs were bare almost to his knees. He had a considerable way to walk, over rough ground, and needed as much freedom for his limbs as he could get. He turned to the left of the road along which they had come, and went almost at right angles to it, at first through vineyards and gardens, then through corn-fields, then through waste land, going down hill all the time. When he reached the waste land he began to go very cautiously, pausing behind every stone or olive tree and scanning the land before him with the greatest care. At last he seemed to see what he had been looking for. In the shade of a group of olive trees half a dozen men were sitting, so deep in conversation that Samuel was able to creep up behind them, unnoticed, and dispose himself comfortably within earshot, entirely unperceived by them.

"As for the corn in the field of lilies, we shall not harvest it for a week," said one, in an ill-tempered, aggressive voice.

"You will be fools, then—it is ripe now for harvesting," said another, with a sneer.

"I tell you, Jeconiah," cried the first speaker with a rising voice, "I will do nothing to gratify

any shepherd in Judea—what do *I* care where and how the sheep are pastured?"

"Hophni is right!" cried another; "I myself—" and in a moment all the group were protesting and arguing and denying. In the middle of the disputation a long whistle was heard, and immediately there was silence.

"That was *his* whistle," said Jeconiah; "there he is, coming up the hillside." There was another pause, and Samuel waited a moment, breathless. Then he twisted his head and got a glimpse of the newcomer.

It was a boy about fifteen years old, well grown but slight, with a mop of golden-red hair, and large blue smiling eyes. From his bag, oaken club, and long staff, it was plain he was a shepherd; from his silver bracelet, and the beads twisted round his head, it was plain he was not a servant, but the son of the owner of the flocks.

"The Lord be with you," he said, and pressed his finger-tips against his lips, his forehead, and his breast. Samuel noticed the clear, mellow sound of his voice and its musical intonation.

"May you have peace," answered one of the men.

"Sit down," said another, "and let us consider about the pasturage of these sheep of yours."

"My father's sheep," suggested the boy.

"Of course—your father's sheep. You cannot come up among our corn-fields; it is impossible."

"Impossible," insisted Hophni; "we are resolved against it, no matter whose the sheep."

"It does not rest with you," exclaimed Jeconiah fiercely; "it is a custom of our fathers that in May, after the harvest . . ."

"I care for no custom—no sheep come into our corn-fields."

"Let the sheep into the corn-fields!" exclaimed the boy in a shocked voice. "Who would be such a heathen! Such a fine harvest as it has been. I came up just now by the field of lilies and the crop was a pleasure to look upon."

"We shall not harvest it for a week," grunted Hophni.

"Surely a few days more would improve it—if only the Jebusites were not making raids again. In a week, I fear there may be nothing to harvest."

Hophni and his friends stared at one another. They were horribly near Jerusalem.

"Had you not heard?" continued the boy, smoothly. "They were at Geba a few days since and carried off all that was in the fields. I am sure my father could spare a man or two to help you, and then you would not mind the flocks being in the bare fields, would you?"

"If he would help with the harvest . . . what do you say?" Hophni appealed to his friends, and Jeconiah had enough sense to be silent. There was a whispered consultation, and it was agreed in the end that in consideration of some help to save the crop from the Jebusites the sheep should be allowed in the fields after the harvest.

"After all, Hophni," said one of his supporters timidly, "it is the custom of our fathers. . . ."

Hophni grunted, but did not deny it.

The matter being settled, the men rose from the ground. A few minutes were spent in salutations, and they separated; the boy going down the hill to his flocks, the others going upward to their fields and vineyards. Samuel, too, when the others were out of sight, got up, and returned, slowly and painfully, to the sacred grove.

By the time he had reached it, plucked the unwilling Elihu from his sleep, untethered the beasts, and mounted the ass, the shadows were lengthening. They had now only about a mile to go to Bethlehem, but Samuel was anxious to arrive in good time, and they made no delays. At the foot of the ascent on which Bethlehem was perched, and beside the gate in the wall that enclosed it, they found a well, and Elihu tried hard to persuade his master to wait and refresh the beasts and themselves with a draft

of what he declared was the most delicious water in the world, but Samuel only shook his head impatiently and pressed forward.

A child playing by the gateway saw them, gave a shriek, and disappeared in one of the stone huts which formed the village. Presently a cautious head or two was peering out at them, and in a few moments a group of dignified old men approached, bowing and saluting, and driving back the crowd of villagers who had somehow learnt that the Prophet Samuel had come, and wanted to have a look at him.

One of the old men stepped forward and said, in an anxious voice, "Yahweh be with you. Do you come in peace?"

"Yahweh bless and preserve you," replied Samuel. "Yes, I come in peace. I have come to make a sacrifice for Jesse, the son of Obed, for him and all his household. Here is the beast for the sacrifice."

There was a great bustle among the villagers. Some rushed off to Jesse's house to tell his women to prepare for Samuel and to begin the arrangements for the feast, some surrounded Elihu, greeted him as an old friend, and led him and the cow off to the place of sacrifice; others began pushing Jesse forward, shouting out to him that he was in luck—but that he always was a lucky man.

Jesse did not seem at all flustered by his promotion. He came forward, saluted Samuel and showed him the way to his house. It was a big house, for Jesse was a well-to-do man; it had two rooms and a courtyard between them. Preparations for the sacrifice were in full swing and all the household were busy making ready the accessories of the feast—the main dish, of course, would be the sacrifice itself.

Directly Jesse arrived he went with his sons into one of the rooms, where they all purified themselves, by bathing and washing their clothes. Then they came out into the courtyard and found Samuel waiting for them.

"Jesse," said the Prophet, solemnly, "I have come to-day to choose out one of your sons for the service of Yahweh. Let me then look at them one by one, that I may see which of them he has taken for his servant."

Without any words Jesse turned to his eldest son, Eliab, and signed to him to go to the Prophet. Samuel looked at him; he was tall and handsome; but Samuel shook his head and let him pass.

"Abinadab!" called Jesse; and another stepped up to Samuel. He shook his head again.

"Shammah!" But Shammah too was rejected. Four more of Jesse's sons went up to Samuel, who

looked carefully at them all, but chose none of them. There was a long pause. Samuel was waiting. At last he said:

"Are these all your sons?"

"There is still the youngest," answered Jesse. "He is in the fields, keeping the sheep."

"Send and fetch him," said Samuel; "we will not begin the feast till he is here."

At a sign from Jesse one of the young men hastened off in the direction of the fields to find the shepherd, while another brought a blanket and folded it on the ground for the Prophet to sit on while he waited. The others turned to their household affairs, leaving him alone in the gathering darkness of the courtyard.

"He had to be of the tribe of Judah," thought Samuel; "no other would meet with the same favor from all the rest. Besides, Judah grows stronger every day—the south of the country is all theirs, the Canaanites no longer hold up their heads here, even Simeon and Dan are practically absorbed. A king from the tribe of Judah has a better chance than any other. . . . Then as for this boy of Jesse's. He seems a born leader. Every one I have spoken to seems to think well of him for one reason or another. If he can affect men like that at his age there is a chance he may be able to lead the nation

later on. Anyhow, I will risk it. He is still a boy, it is true, but Saul will last a few years yet—there is no immediate hurry. When Saul gets worse the boy must be brought to Gibeah, and if he is the right sort he will manage for himself after that. . . . Saul must not get wind of it, though. . . . Yes, I don't doubt he had to be from Judah. . . ."

By this time it was quite dark. Suddenly a light appeared in the doorway of one of the rooms, and a figure stepped through it, silhouetted by the lamp some one else was holding. It was the figure of a boy, naked, except for his loin-cloth, from the purification. For a moment the light behind his head made his golden hair shine around him like a flame; then he turned round and took the lamp in his own hand so that the light fell on his face. He stepped through the dark space toward the Prophet who sat waiting for him, the beauty of his face and smiling blue eyes lit up by the lamp in his hand, his white limbs shining faintly, his step lithe and wary. And Samuel heard a voice in his heart say:

"Arise, anoint him: for this is he."

He got to his feet, and moving toward the place where his ass was tethered slipped his hand into

the saddlebag and took out a flask. Then he turned back to the boy.

"What is your name?"

"David, the son of Jesse."

Samuel paused. He could not help remembering the other consecration . . . he had felt as sure *then* that he was right . . . but this time, this time. . . .

He drew David toward him and poured the flask of oil over his head, kissed him on both cheeks and said: "David, son of Jesse, Yahweh has anointed thee to be king over his inheritance."

There was a pause. David gave a little gasp, and said in a low voice: "But Saul? And Saul's sons?"

"Wait," answered Samuel in as low a voice, "the time of your kingdom is not till after the kingdom of Saul. And if you value my life or yours tell no one of what I have done to you."

Nothing more passed between them. They went back into the living-room, where the feast was now ready, and in a few moments all the household were sitting on the floor enjoying the rare meal of beef. They ate and drank and made merry, and in the faint light of the poor oil lamps no one noticed that David's hair was wet and his forehead shining, and

that his eyes smiled more brilliantly than before.

"Sing to us, David," said Jesse, when the eating and drinking slackened. David took his harp from wall and sang the old song of his fathers:

Judah, all thy brethren shall praise thee;
Thy hand shall be upon the neck of thine enemy,
Thy father's sons shall bow down before thee. . . .

The sceptre shall not depart from Judah,
Nor the ruler's staff from between his feet,
Until peace has come to the country,
And unto him shall the people be obedient. . . .

Chapter II

Four young men were together under the long blue shadow of one of the rocks in the desert of Judea. Two of them had thrown off their outer garments and were engaged in wrestling; a third—a boy of about sixteen—was watching them from the top of the rock, and shouting words of encouragement now to one, now to the other; the fourth was looking on the ground for pieces of stone suitable to use in his sling. Suddenly one of the wrestlers gave a shout, and threw his opponent to the ground.

"Well done, Joab! Well done!" cried the boy, waving his arms.

"Now, David," said Joab, a trifle breathlessly, "I 'm ready for you."

"No, thank you," said David, looking up from the ground and smiling. "I want to be able to walk home for the feast of the new moon, and not lie in one of the caves, with a broken leg."

"You wait a bit, Joab," said Abishai crossly, sitting up and rubbing the back of his leg. "Next time I 'll settle you in a way you won't like."

"Next time! next time!" laughed Joab; "next time will be like last time, and the time before! Now, Asahel, if David 's afraid of me, I'll take you on."

"Don't you touch him!" cried Abishai; "you're so rough, you 'll injure him—a child like that!"

"I 'm not a child! I 'm not afraid of him! I 'll fight him if David won't!" cried Asahel eagerly, slipping down from the rock and beginning to pull off his coat.

"Asahel!" said David suddenly. "I believe I heard one of the lambs down in the gully bleat. I should n't be surprised if it was that lion again—he 's getting so daring. Run and see what it is, do, and call out if I 'm wanted."

"All right." Asahel was proud of his speed,

and forgetting Joab's defiance he bounded off toward the sound of the bleating.

Joab laughed. "Asahel might be one of David's precious lambs," he said, and began to put on his coat, for evening had come and there is a very quick drop in temperature in the Judean desert at night. Abishai dragged himself up from the ground with a groan and began limping toward the rock on which he had thrown his coat; before he had reached it David swung himself up, pulled down the coat and threw it at Abishai's feet.

"David! David!" Asahel's voice sounded thin and distant. "David! the lion!"

"Ah! son of Azazel!" ejaculated David, and seizing his club and his sling he bounded off with a step almost as rapid as that of Asahel himself.

Joab and Abishai, left alone together, did not speak. Joab was thinking: "David is a strong fellow; but though he makes a joke of it he is serious enough in knowing I am his master at wrestling. As for Abishai, I am sick of knocking him down. Some day I will go out against the Philistines, in the king's army, and show *them* how I can wrestle. . . ."

Abishai was thinking: "Joab thinks he is better than I am at wrestling, but he only gets me down by a trick—as far as strength goes I am his master.

I will get David to show me one of *his* tricks—David will do anything for me—and then we shall see what will happen to Joab. . . ."

They were both far enough away from the rock where they were sitting, when the sound of a shout at a great distance reached them. Immediately they were listening keenly; Joab jumped up and answered with as loud a shout as he could achieve.

"That was not David," said Abishai.

"No," said Joab, "David went south. That shout came from the west."

"A messenger from Bethlehem," suggested Abishai.

The shout was repeated, nearer at hand.

"Very likely," agreed Joab, and again gave his answering call. In a few minutes a man appeared, coming down the track from the west, and it was not long before he reached the place where the brothers sat.

When he saw there only two, and that they were Joab and Abishai, his face fell.

"Where is David?" he asked. "Jesse has sent me for him in a hurry."

"He 's not far off," replied Joab. "Here 's Asahel—David won't be far behind."

"He killed it! he killed it!" shouted Asahel, jumping and dancing with delight as he came to-

ward them. "It was a lion and he killed it. And there was a bear too. Hullo, Ithra, what are you doing here? David has just killed a lion. . . ."

David came up a few yards behind Asahel, and hearing from Ithra that his father wanted him and was in a hurry, he stopped for nothing, but picked up his bag, called out to his nephews to mind the sheep, and set off at such a pace up the hill that it was evident he would not be long in getting home. The others lingered round Asahel and listened to his eager story of how the lion had been killed and the bear driven off.

David had a stiff two-hours' climb before him. There was now practically no light left, but the ground was so familiar to him that he covered it almost as quickly as he would have done by day. In a few minutes the rhythm of his movement had caused a curious quickening of his mind. Starting from the obvious wonder at what caused his father to send for him at such an hour, he was soon weaving webs of romance, triumph, and mystery, the shuttle in his brain passing rapidly to and fro between the threads of the past and the future.

The starting point of all his dreams was now that wonderful scene in his father's courtyard where he had first been brought face to face with a prophet. He seemed again to see, peering into his

own eyes, scanning them, searching, he felt, his inmost thoughts and weaknesses, the old man's fiery eyes, deep-set in his white, thick-lined face. Again he heard the low voice, shaking yet emphatic, announce him as the Lord's anointed; again he felt the thick, sweet-smelling oil drop on his hair, trickle down his neck, and lodge, a rich pool, in the hollow of his collar bone. . . .

Since then he had heard nothing of Samuel. Now, perhaps, the time had come. . . . Saul was dead, and Samuel had come for him to take him to Nob and proclaim him king. They would journey northwards together, through the night, Samuel instructing him as to his policy in the difficult situation in which he would find himself. . . . He would listen to everything and say nothing, but when it came to acting he would use his own judgment—Samuel should find he was no puppet-king. . . . When they reached Nob—well, what about Jonathan? . . . and the Benjamite guards of the king? . . . Oh . . . Samuel would have collected a few strong Judeans at Nob—they would have arranged to arm his nephews and one or two others he knew, and to send them northwards as quickly as possible—so that by the time Jonathan arrived they would be ready for him.

David's pulse beat quicker and the scene became

more vivid. "Jonathan comes forward at the head of his men; Samuel lays his hand on me and cries, '*This* is the Lord's anointed'; the Benjamites look at me—some throw down their weapons, some slink over to my side—but the rest draw close to Jonathan. Jonathan, tall, strong, angry, and frightful to behold, steps out from among them and cries out: 'David, son of Jesse, let us fight for the kingdom!' I break from Samuel and the fight begins . . . well, in the end I hit him a violent blow on the head with my club, and he lies dead at my feet . . . the onlookers cry, 'Long live King David!' I fall back bleeding and triumphant into Samuel's arms. . . . Oh! here is the well! I must have come up the hill at a good pace."

David took a deep draft of the water, threw a few handfuls of it over his head and chest, and in five minutes had reached his father's house.

As he pushed his way through the courtyard, and then stooped to pass through the low doorway into the room beyond, he murmured to himself:

"And Asahel shall be my armor-bearer—but I 'll keep that part of it till later."

He saw at once in the dim light that there was a stranger there; and in a moment recognized him as the Prophet's servant, Elihu, a man who, in former years, had been a servant of his father's.

He noticed, too, that his mother and sisters were unusually busy—it was clear that something exceptional was on foot.

"David? Is that you, my son?" asked Jesse, hearing him come in.

"Yes, Father."

"You have been very quick."

"Ithra said you were in a hurry." David looked in his father's face and smiled.

"Yes. Here is Elihu, a messenger from our lord the king. It seems you are wanted, David, to sing to him when he is ill; your mother is making ready some things for you to take him as a present, that he may be pleased to see you. . . . Rest now, and you shall start before dawn."

It was rather disappointing, David thought, as he lay down in the dark, that it was only Saul who wanted him to play the harp and sing—and yet, how exciting to be leaving Bethlehem to-morrow, to be going to Gibeah, to the king's house. . . .

Just then a hand touched his head, and a voice whispered:

"David. . . ."

"Mother!" he answered, recognizing her through the darkness.

"My darling David . . . going away to-morrow. . . . Ah, you will never come back."

"Never come back? Dearest Mother, of course I shall come back . . . It is only twelve miles off. . . ."

"No . . . it will never be *this* David . . . but don't forget us. . . ."

"Of course not . . . never, never . . ." He fondled her gently.

"When you come back you will be a great man. . . ."

"Yes—perhaps—but I shall always be your David."

She sighed, caressed his head, and left him. As he lay back in the darkness he saw a picture of himself striking the harp, while King Saul and the mighty men of Benjamin stood around him in admiration. . . .

Chapter III

"Ah," Elihu was saying, as they jogged along the road to Gibeah next morning, "well I know this road and well I remember the last time I came along it. You were only a child then, David. It was when the Prophet Samuel and I came to make a sacrifice at your father's house. Do you remember

it? Or perhaps you were away in the fields with the sheep."

"I remember it," answered David; "but tell me, Elihu, how do you come to be going messages for Saul, if you are a servant of Samuel?"

"I *was* a servant of Samuel's, true enough; and you may say I am still—and yet I am a servant of Saul's! . . . Well, I won't puzzle you any more—it 's like this. Samuel and Saul are not friends now, and Samuel won't go to see Saul; why, for years—since before that time he came to sacrifice at your father's house—he has n't been to Gibeah. But for all that he likes to know what goes on there, so I serve in the king's house, and from time to time go over to Ramah and tell Samuel the news."

David stared at Elihu, and stroked his chin.

"I see," he said, and thought a long time. Presently he had another question.

"How came the king to think of me as a harp player?"

"Ah, that was my doing, David, and if you make a success of it I hope you will remember me. This was how it happened. Saul has been possessed of a devil for a long time, and the devil is getting worse and Saul is sometimes a terror. Now, as Samuel said to me one day, music is well known to

frighten devils, and all of us about the king had been searching our minds for weeks to think of some skilful harp player who could attend him when he has the fit. So one day when I was at Ramah and happened to mention something I had done when I lived in Jesse's house, 'Ah,' says Samuel, 'had n't *he* a son who played the harp?' 'To be sure he has,' said I, 'David, his youngest, and a pretty boy he was'—for you *were* pretty when you were a child, David. 'Yes,' says Samuel, 'and if I remember right his singing was as good as his playing. Would not *he* do for the king, Elihu?' 'Why,' said I, 'he is the very one, so I shall tell Saul.' And so I did. And the very next day Saul had me off to Bethlehem to fetch you. So you see whom you have to thank in the matter."

"Yes," said David, "I see whom I have to thank." And his heart sank within him for a moment, for it seemed to him the court would be a more slippery place than he had suspected, and one where it would be perilously easy to lose one's footing. "But then," he thought, "it is clear that Samuel is concerned in what happens to me, and he—and the Lord—will be my helper."

They had started in good time, and it was still morning when they came in sight of the low-built huts that made the town of Gibeah. Saul's house

consisted of a group of these small huts, placed around a courtyard, and at this hour the yard was full of men and beasts, the inevitable accompaniment of a center of government. David took from off his ass the presents Jesse had sent the king, and Elihu called to a boy to come and take charge of them. Then Elihu forced his way through the throng to the door of one of the huts and was presently beckoning to David and the boy to come that way. When David reached the door he found himself in front of a big, burly man with black eyes, and black eyebrows nearly meeting across his forehead.

"Are you David?" he said, putting his hand on his shoulder. "Well, go in there; he's anxious to see you."

David stooped, and stood up in the king's chamber.

The room was bigger, loftier, and, above all, lighter than any he had been in before. Though it was not yet midday he saw everything in the room, quite clearly. In one corner were the teraphim—long shapeless bits of wood, shiny from the caresses of many pleading and adoring hands. At the back of the room, next to the wall, ran a long bench; in front of it went a long table. The bench was covered with hangings and rugs—amazingly

rich and fine they seemed to David—and in the middle, where it was raised somewhat, and separated from the rest, a man was sitting.

He was sunk among the cushions on his seat, his head hanging down on his breast, his fingers playing listlessly with his beard. At David's step he looked up quickly, showing a white face, and blazing hot eyes, with circles under them which looked as if they had been marked in with charcoal.

"Who are you?" he cried out, jumping up in his seat and beginning to fumble in his belt. "How did you come here? Who let you in? Abner! Abner! who is this?"

David ran forward, holding out his hands, and when he was near made a low obeisance.

"I am David, the son of Jesse the Bethlehemite, come to be my lord's servant and harp player."

"Ah . . . David . . ." answered Saul, sinking back; "I have been waiting for you. . . . What is that boy doing?" he asked, his voice rising again sharply.

"He only carries a few small presents my father ventures to send to my lord—some bread my mother made, a kid, and a bottle of wine. No doubt my lord has much better wine, but we think highly of this—it comes from a grape we call the 'hen and chicken,' and this year the vintage has been very

sweet. As for the kid, it should have been a lamb, but we have been unfortunate this spring with our lambs. A lion has been ravaging the flocks—no longer ago than yesterday he was out, and a bear with him."

"Yesterday, did you say? Did they do much damage?"

"Not this time, my lord. . . . Directly I found there was a lion there I crept down into the gully to see what he was doing. He had picked up a lamb in his mouth and was making off, so I ran after him and hit his mouth with my club. That made him drop the lamb and come for me. I let him get quite near and then caught hold of his beard with one hand and hit him with the club till I had finished him."

Saul's red eyes had been following eagerly. "Well done—and the bear?"

"The bear was kind enough to wait till I had settled with the lion; then he came creeping out of a cave a good hundred yards off. I was tired with the drubbing I had given one thief, so did not care to engage in a tussle with the other. I took out my sling and sent a stone which caught my Lord Bear on the face—it must have been his eye, for he fell down, and did not get up again."

Saul threw himself back, laughing uproariously.

"Well done! well done!" he cried. "Do so with the Philistines and you will be a famous man." Then he began to shout, "Abner! Abner! Abner! Why don't you come, Abner?"

A moment later the big, black-faced man who had received David came in and made a clumsy bow to Saul.

"Abner, this is David." Saul spoke in a quick, jerky, excited way, laughing queerly between the sentences. "Do you see him? Is n't he beautiful? Look at his golden hair—look at his smiling eyes—Ah! he 's a beautiful boy! and as wise as he 's beautiful, and as brave as he 's wise. . . . And Abner—why did I want you?—Oh yes, send to thank . . . Josiah for his gifts—such choice gifts, I am ashamed to take them—and tell him, Abner, tell him that David has found favor in my sight. Do you hear? What are you waiting for? Go and do these things at once, at once, at once. Now, David, sit down there and let me hear more. . . ."

Abner came out of the king's room looking blacker than ever.

"Ha, Jonathan!" he said to a young man who caught hold of his coat and looked at him questioningly. "He 's beginning one of his wild, excitable moods . . . We shall have another fit by the evening, I have n't a doubt. . . ."

Chapter IV

Abner was unfortunately right. After an outburst of frenzied excitement, started, apparently, by David's appearance, Saul suddenly collapsed, under a reaction as powerful and more devastating. He ordered away every one who came near him, had curtains hung up to exclude every ray of light, and finally took refuge in the women's apartments, flinging himself down on a pile of rugs and burying his face from sight. His whole body was shaken with violent sobs, and his teeth chattered. Every few moments a groan burst from him, seeming to tear his lungs as it escaped. He was quite lost to the world of sense around; the waves of some terrible ocean, ordinarily hidden and controlled by the subtle and ingenious mechanism of the mind, had temporarily swept away the gates and banks that kept it in check, or diverted it into safe channels, and submerged his whole being under its dark and stormy waters.

This was the time when the psychiatry of the day declared that the harp was indicated; and accordingly David, harp in hand, was thrust into the darkened room where the wretched man lay.

The boy at first crouched silent and motionless

in a corner. He had never known anything like this. He did not for a moment doubt that some devil had possession of the king. He *did* doubt whether Yahweh was mighty enough to deal with it. He was himself, in some strange way, affected by the terrible emotions which seemed to be rending Saul.

"Is this real?" he said to himself, "or am I in one of my dreams? . . . Why is my heart beating so? . . . What will happen next?"

Directly curiosity awoke he felt calmer, though the whole business still seemed unreal. He picked up his harp, and moved gently across the room to where Saul lay. Still half blind in the darkness, he put out his hand to feel his way, and touched a quivering body . . . For a moment it was still, and he quickly withdrew his hand . . . The quivering, he was aware, immediately began again. After a moment's hesitation he put his hand out once more, and this time laid it firmly on the king's shoulder. Again there was a period of stillness; then the body turned slightly and a weak, trembling voice whispered:

"Who is that?"

"David," he answered, very clearly, but very softly.

"David" . . . repeated the other . . . Silence;

and then the body began to tremble and the teeth to chatter.

But David, who had felt the pleasure of exercising power, was vexed to find his success so short-lived, and without considering the unsuitability of such behavior toward a king said, still in a low voice, but with great decision:

"Hush . . . do not shiver so. . . ."

The king was quiet.

Now, thought David, is the time for the harp; he picked it up and without conscious selection began to sing the first quiet, soothing tune that came into his head. It happened to be a lullaby —the lullaby with which his mother had always sung him to sleep as a child.

Close your eyes, close your eyes, little child,
The sky is dark, the hills are dark,
Close your eyes.

Close your eyes, close your eyes, little love,
The birds sleep, the beasts sleep,
Close your eyes.

Close your eyes, close your eyes, little prince,
God watches, I watch,
Close your eyes. . . .

By this time David was accustomed to the dark-

ness, and he could see Saul looking restlessly here and there and panting like a frightened animal. As he sang, however, fixing his own gaze on the sick man's, he found it, too, becoming fixed . . . and as he continued, insistently, over and over again, "Close your eyes, close your eyes . . ." he saw the red eyes close—the panting become still. At last Saul slept.

For a long time the two remained thus without moving. David himself was half dazed by the success of his efforts, the strangeness of the scene, and the curious, contagious emotion that he seemed to have caught from the sufferer. He was too much agitated to make daydreams; his thoughts seemed to come in great flashes, leaving big blanks of dark non-consciousness in between.

"Shall I succeed again? . . . Will it come often? . . . How will he be when he wakes? . . . He was different this morning. . . . *Then* he laughed too much. . . . Sometimes he will be angry. . . . After all, it 's very exciting. . . . I managed it all right. . . ."

Now all this time David had thought that he and Saul were alone together. Suddenly, from behind the rugs on which Saul lay, appeared the head of a girl. She had been crouching on the ground, her face hidden, her clothes mingling with

the draperies on the couch, and when she lifted her head David started so violently that the harp dropped from his hand.

She frowned, and put a finger to her lip.

David blushed furiously, picked up the harp, and stared at her.

She gazed back at him and smiled; then slowly, so slowly that in the dim light he almost doubted his own eyes, a delicate blush tinged her face and her eyes fell. Without any sound she rose to her feet, and with still downcast eyes she disappeared behind a curtain.

Chapter V

The next day Saul still needed the services of David. The violent fancy he had taken to him seemed to continue, though apparently his recollections of the events of the previous night were extremely nebulous. He did not speak or move much, but kept David beside him and occasionally made him sing. Toward nightfall the doorkeeper announced that Abner wished to see the king, and Saul, who was now rapidly recovering, ordered him to be admitted.

After the usual salutations and greetings Abner came quickly to business. News was coming in that the Philistines were preparing for war. Jonathan had seen the messengers and was uneasy. He wished to go out with a few men on a reconnaissance to hear what the people of Dan thought about the situation. Had he the king's permission for such an expedition?

Saul sighed, but agreed it was the best thing to be done, and a few moments later Jonathan came in, received his father's blessing, and was off. David, sitting in the darkness behind Saul's couch, watched him curiously, thinking to himself that this was the man from whom Samuel and he were to pluck the power and the throne. . . . He could not help smiling as he looked, for Jonathan's calm, open face was so different from the wild, ruthless expression he had pictured to himself. How would it come about? Perhaps Jonathan would fall into the hands of the Philistines on this very expedition and lose his life, and then Saul would adopt—well, Armoni and Meribaal and Ishbaal could easily be killed by the Philistines too. . . .

Several weeks passed quietly away. Jonathan was constantly going and coming. Abner was looking over arms and equipment, and all the young men were exercising themselves and practising

their skill in throwing lances and slinging stones. David, with his experience as a shepherd, soon gained a reputation among them for the accuracy and strength of his slinging, and Saul, after watching him one whole morning, declared he should be his armor-bearer.

At last news arrived that the Philistine army had set out from Gath. Saul, Abner, and Jonathan held a council of war, and it was decided that Jonathan should start south with a first contingent the next evening, while Saul and Abner should follow the day after with the rest of the men who might come in from the outlying tribes. They were to meet at Azekah, a slope to the north of one of the passes leading from Philistia into the heart of the Judean country.

Most of that day David spent in the courtyard and watched the tribesmen arriving and being marshaled into their hundreds and thousands. They were armed in primitive fashion with a club and sling, or a rough spear with a stone head, or sometimes—but very rarely—a bronze head. There were no iron weapons at all, and indeed David had never heard of such things, though he knew that some of the tribesmen had iron plowshares. He could not understand Jonathan's serious look, nor the number of times he shook his head and mur-

mured that things were in a bad way. To David's eyes the men were stalwart, the arms in good condition, and if the omens turned out favorable there was no reason they should not exterminate the Philistines to the last man. When the men were ready and he saw Jonathan for the first time in his bronze armor, and saw him pull an iron sword from a scabbard at his side and wave it in the air, David was convinced that it would be altogether impossible for any army to resist the Israelites—he watched them march out of Gibeah with the thrill and tingle of undaunted confidence.

On the following morning the rest of the Israelites set out. David now found himself the delighted bearer of Saul's armor—even heavier and more beautifully chased than Jonathan's—and on the way to the camp David's thoughts were fully occupied with the wonderful adventures in which he was to win from the Philistines as superb an outfit for himself.

It was too dark when they arrived to see anything of the situation of the camp, but daylight brought understanding. Saul's army was on the top of a steep bluff, facing southwest. Below them was a rich valley, about a quarter of a mile wide, through which rushed a mountain brook in a deep ravine, its bed strewn with white stones. On the hills

opposite to them were the tents of the Philistines, and the Israelites could watch them swarming about like bees. It was clear, even to one as inexperienced in warfare as David, that the Israelite army was in a magnificent position to prevent the Philistines from forcing the pass, but that if they themselves took the offensive they would put themselves in the enemy's power. In fact, whichever side attempted to cross the ravine first would be at the mercy of the other.

Presently David noticed a little group of Philistines run down the hill, and one of them, clearly a big man, all in armor, detach himself from the others and begin striding up and down the meadow, gesticulating so that the sun flashed on his bronze armor. After a while he rejoined his companions, and all together they climbed back again up to the camp. David wondered what it had been about—perhaps an invocation to his gods, he thought.

The danger of taking the initiative was quite apparent to both armies, and for several days they remained on the hillsides watching each other and making no movement. Every morning the big Philistine walked up and down, waving his arms and shouting, and the Israelites discovered that he was challenging them to single combat and calling

them white-livered garbage for not responding. Some of the young Benjamites were angry and wanted to rush down on him in a body and silence him, but Abner had violently forbidden any such rash action.

One evening, when Saul had said he did not want him, David went off toward the tents of the men of Judah. His three eldest brothers were there and many other young men he knew, including his nephew Joab, Elhanan, also a youth of Bethlehem, and a certain Eleazar, son of Dodai. This evening he found them sitting together in a group, making merry over some bottles of wine and some cakes which Jesse had sent to his sons.

"My father is a man of sense," Eliab was saying, as David came up. "He sent by the same messenger a handsome present of wine, cheese, and bread to the captain of our thousand, so we three are in his good books, and he won't say anything at our enjoying ourselves to-night."

"Give me a drink!" cried David, pushing into the circle, taking the wine skin from Elhanan, and sitting down beside him. "Ah! this is the stuff! If I drink enough of this I shall be ready to go and settle old Goliath, as they call him, myself, single-handed!"

The young men laughed and declared that on

those terms he was welcome to the rest of the wine, but Eliab called out:

"No, no! Don't you believe him! I know him of old—it 's only a trick to finish the wine—he never means to go near the Philistines!"

"What! not to win the king's daughter, who has been promised to the man who kills Goliath?" asked Elhanan.

And the others laughed again.

"Don't you believe it," said David. "He 's far more likely to get a dressing down from Abner for crossing the brook—though I think myself the fellow deserves a lesson for his disgusting language."

"It would n't be necessary to cross the brook in order to lay him out," said Elhanan. "I could reach him myself with a stone from my sling from this side of the water. . . ."

"Yes," answered Eleazar, "and have all the pack that go with him cut you in pieces before you 'd climbed out of the ravine."

"Not if half a dozen of us went down with him," put in Joab. "We could see to it that he had fair play."

David silently held the wine skin out to Elhanan with a meaning look, and there was a shout of amusement from the others. Elhanan grinned and looked sheepish, but muttered that he meant it.

"Well," said David, "why not? Keep the plan dark so that we're not stopped; let ten of us go down to the brook in ones and twos and no one will notice us. Let Elhanan have the first shot at Goliath and the rest of us will be ready to settle any of his friends who come within reach. What do you say? Who else will come?"

With the party of hot-heads sitting there eager for a fight and despising anybody who hung back for a strategic reason, it was easy enough to find plenty of support for such a dashing scheme, however foolhardy it might appear to soberer spirits. Twelve of them were soon agreed to take part in the attempt; the rest were bound over to secrecy, and after a few more details as to time and place had been settled, the conspirators parted to make the most of the hours of rest that remained before the adventure began.

Chapter VI

Saul and Abner were standing on the hillside looking down to the valley of Elah. On the other side of the brook the gigantic figure of the Philistine was seen making his usual descent of the hill-

side to taunt, and perhaps lure out, the men of Israel. Abner was biting his underlip and growling as he watched, and his black eyebrows made a line across his forehead.

"May Azazel be my ruin!" he exclaimed at last. "If he stands there much longer I shall go down myself to fight him! I don't know what young men are made of nowadays! When *I* was young no orders under heaven would have prevented us from knocking on the head a villain who behaved as insultingly as this one! I wonder you can put up with it, Saul."

"If we don't put up with that we may have to put up with something worse," answered Saul. "But I 'm afraid from the look of things the young men are not so degenerate as you make out; I see a lot of movement down by the brook, and there are three of them running down the hill under the shadow of those olive trees."

"By the Lord, so there are. And look, the Philistines have seen them too, and are sending an extra number of men down with their courageous Goliath, who is too grand or too lazy to carry his own shield. Well, I 'll run up to the camp and have our men ready to stand by in case their help is needed. I 'll send David down to you with your armor."

But that Abner was not able to do. David was crouching down in the ravine where the brook rushed past, clutching his sling and his club and watching intently while Goliath came nearer and nearer. Suddenly Elhanan, who was also in the ravine a little way off, jumped up on the bank, and swung his sling; Goliath fell face forward on the ground without a word, and never moved. His companions, who, on seeing an Israelite unexpectedly appearing within their reach for the first time since they had come down to do battle had begun to run forward, hesitated at the quite unexpected fall of their champion. At this moment Elhanan's supporters sprang up too, and the Philistines, petrified at the appearance of a dozen where they looked for only one, stood stock still, and immediately received a volley of stones from the Israelites. David's hand shook so much with excitement that his first stone fell wide. He stooped to pick up another and when he raised his head the whole scene had changed. Across the brook a mass of Philistines were pouring down the hill to support their friends; and of the latter half a dozen had recovered from their alarm and were almost upon the brook.

Up to this moment the young men who had gone out with their slings had been acting more or less independently. They had agreed to let Elhanan

shoot first, but beyond that they had made no plans —they were not even grouped together—and when they looked up and saw the whole Philistine army coming down toward them they hesitated and wavered. David suddenly realized that he was practically alone—with no help—in the way of a charging army. His body felt icy cold and his belly hollow and empty. Almost automatically he swung his sling and could hardly believe his eyes when he saw a Philistine go down. Then he heard a shout behind him, turned, and saw a troop of friendly Benjamites racing down the hill toward them. It flashed upon him that this was the battle —that as yet he had done nothing—that if he was not quick the men of Benjamin would be in it before he was. He leapt the brook, with a cry of "Judah! Judah!" and scrambled out of the ravine into the south side of the valley. As he shouted the other Judeans gathered courage. In a moment they too had crossed the stream, and at once all began following the lead of David. As he bounded along he was conscious first of Joab and then of Eleazar beside him; two or three stones flew over his head from the Judean slings and at that the nearest Philistines turned and fled.

Nevertheless, this was, in reality, the most dangerous moment of the battle. The handful of

Israelites in the ravine and south of the brook could do nothing decisive alone; the main body were rushing impetuously down the hill, and would soon be involved in the difficulties of the mountain torrent and its steep banks. If the Philistines had collected themselves, and remained firm on their own hillside, the situation they had manœuvered for would have been attained, and the Israelites would have been in their hands.

But the Philistines could not collect themselves. Their nerves had been shaken by seeing Goliath the unconquerable fall; the men going down the hill to the attack had become involved in the men flying from the Israelite slingers, and the impetuous dash of the Benjamites down the northern slope suddenly seemed catastrophic and irresistible. Moreover, the situation was one in which the great war chariots on which they chiefly relied were useless, even if they had been on the spot. Panic seized them; and before David had run many steps up the hill he saw to his amazement that they were abandoning the camp and were tearing—a desperate and disorganized mob—westward along the valley, toward the pass into Philistia.

The pursuit of the flying Philistines was a long and tiring one. David found himself—by tacit consent of his companions—in command of the men

on the south side of the river—the original skirmishers, reinforced by some of the quickest-footed of the Benjamites. On the north side the main body was led by the flashing bronze armor of Jonathan, and David instinctively kept his little group in line with them. As far as the top of the pass they had things their own way, and did great slaughter upon the rearward Philistines. Once over the pass, however, they would be approaching Philistia, and David realized that he did not at all know how far it would be safe to go. He fixed his eye, therefore, on Jonathan; and with him checked his eager followers when they came in sight of the towers of Gath.

In the cool of the evening the triumphant army straggled back, making a detour through the deserted Philistine camp in order to carry off any booty that remained there. The tents had, however, been pretty thoroughly ransacked before David reached them. Nowhere could he find the armor that he had set his heart upon, and only after long search a short-handled spear with an iron head. As it was the first iron he had ever possessed, he tried to console himself with it, but could not help lamenting in his heart that his first adventure had not won him the armor of his dreams. Coming down the hill to cross the valley in returning to the

Israelite camp, he passed the dead body of Goliath. Elhanan was standing beside it measuring the height—close upon seven feet they found it. David helped him to take off the heavy armor, and Elhanan took out the giant's sword and cut off the head with it, and then the two young men carried the armor off to their tents.

Chapter VII

As David pushed his way through the rejoicing crowds that swarmed about the Israelite camp, he noticed a change in the men's attitude toward himself. It had been evident to every one that he had been the leader of the bold enthusiasts to whom the battle and the victory had been due. Saul and Jonathan had been asking for him urgently; and whereas before he had only been a singer and the king's favorite, he was now a successful captain and a popular hero. On every side he was assailed by salutations, greetings, congratulations, and even —that inevitable mark of success—by requests to be remembered. David replied with thanks and by reciprocating greetings to as many as he could, and

with gestures and smiles to the rest. In haste as he was to reach the king's tent, he allowed no one who spoke to him to feel that he was unresponsive.

At last he made his way to the tent, and with a word to the man on guard, lifted the curtain and went in. Saul and Jonathan were both there, sitting on the ground on rugs; both turned toward him as he came in, with smiles and words of welcome.

"Welcome, my beloved," said Saul, making a play of words on his name. "Yahweh has indeed been your friend to-day.[1] Sit down here and tell us all about your doings."

"Certainly, Yahweh has been my friend," answered David, smiling, and sitting crosslegged on the floor as he had been bidden, "but as for my doings, they are not worth mentioning—there were many who did better than I."

Jonathan laughed aloud, and turned to Saul.

"Do not believe him, my father," he said. "Do not let his modesty and generosity hide his courage. I saw him the whole day—I knew that golden hair—leading the men on the south side of the brook—urging them to the pursuit, cheering them when they flagged, restraining them when the time came to return, and himself the first to advance and the last

[1] The name *David* comes, perhaps, from *Dodavahu*, which probably means *Yahweh is a friend* or *Yahweh is beloved.*

to retire. His courage was matched only by his prudence."

The enthusiastic praise thus lavished on him by the heroic Jonathan, whose own exploits in war were famous all over the country, made David's heart beat, and his cheeks flush.

"My lord," said he, softly, to Saul, lowering his eyes and looking at the ground, "as for my prudence it consisted only in watching Jonathan, and guiding my behavior by his." Through his long eyelashes David glanced quickly up at Jonathan, who smiled and shook his head.

"Well," said Saul, "never mind all that; what I want to know is how you got down to the brook at all, who else was with you, and exactly what happened. Tell me all about it."

So David told Saul how the plan had been arranged the night before, and executed in the morning, and ended by begging the king's forgiveness for having disobeyed orders and embarked on such an enterprise unknown to any of the captains.

"Forgive you!" exclaimed Saul; "well, it's true enough it was a rash proceeding and might have turned out badly; but as things are, you have rendered us all a great service, and I shall see you are not the loser. In any case you shall be a captain of a thousand, for it is evident you will make

a good officer. And for yourself . . . what shall I give you, my beautiful David? . . . Jonathan, what shall I give him? . . . David, I will give you my eldest daughter, Merab, to wife!"

In a flash there rose up in David's mind the face of the girl he had seen in Saul's room at Gibeah . . . if this were Merab! But the next moment he recovered himself, and bending forward touched the ground with his forehead.

"My lord thinks too much of what I have done," he said. "Who am I, who are my kinsfolk, that I should be son-in-law to the king?"

Saul, who had spoken with his usual impetuosity, and was already regretting his hasty offer, felt relieved at David's answer.

"Well, well," he returned, "there is no hurry for that . . . You are still young. . . . Now, boys, I will not keep you—I am going to sleep."

David and Jonathan rose, saluted the king, and went out. As they did so Jonathan caught hold of David's arm and looked at him intently.

"David," he said, eagerly, directly they were outside, "come to my tent. . . . I want to speak to you. David," he continued, as soon as they were alone in the tent, "I don't know what has happened to me. I have seen you so often, about my father, at Gibeah, and never noticed you. . . .

I must have been blind . . . but to-day . . . it was like a revelation—as if I was looking at you for the first time. I don't know what it is in you, David . . . you are brave—but it 's not that—you will be a great general—but it 's not that—your voice is like milk and honey, you are the most beautiful boy in the world—but it 's not that, it 's not that—I don't know what it is, but I love you as my own soul."

David made no answer. A pulse was beating in his throat, and he shivered with the rising vehemence of Jonathan's emotion. At last he took Jonathan's hand in his and pressed it to his lips.

"Ah!" cried Jonathan in a voice of triumph; and clasped David in his arms.

In the morning Jonathan and David made a blood covenant. The priest made a cut in the right arm of each, and rubbed the warm blood on the wound of the other. They clasped their hands and swore before Yahweh that they were brothers, and that the friends and enemies of the one should be the friends and enemies of the other. Then Jonathan took for himself David's outer coat, his club, and his sling, and in return laid at David's feet his own bronze armor, iron sword, bow, and leather girdle. But, since the day before, the world

had changed so utterly to David that he picked up the treasures, for which he had longed so passionately, with a feeling of remoteness that amounted almost to indifference. . . .

Chapter VIII

When David returned to Gibeah his whole way of life was changed. He was no longer a mere attendant on the sick king—he was a successful soldier, an admired leader and the friend of Jonathan, the heir to the throne. Moreover—though no one except Jonathan knew it—the king had offered him his daughter Merab as a wife. Yet during these days of success and promise, David thought very little about Samuel's prophetic words, and spent indeed very little time in any dreams. He was extremely busy with his new military duties and any spare moments were absorbed by Jonathan. Once or twice he thought Saul was eyeing him strangely—but he quickly attributed that to the king's health, and forgot it as soon as possible. No more was said about Merab.

One day he suddenly felt homesick; and in the

afternoon walked over to Bethlehem to stay the night there. His father and mother were delighted to see him—so were his brothers and nephews—and their affectionate praise and admiration pleased and invigorated him. He returned to Gibeah the following day and swung along the stony road, gay and confident, sure that the world was full of prizes and triumphs for him to win.

He reached the well outside the gate in the evening, just as the girls of the town were filling their pitchers. Hot and thirsty from his walk, he went up to one of them who was still stooping over the water, and putting his hands together like a cup said softly:

"In the name of Yahweh, give me drink, O daughter of wisdom." The girl looked up quickly and fixed her eyes on David.

"In the name of Yahweh, here is drink for the singer," she replied.

When he saw her face he knew her at once, and the blood rushed into his own; but he kept his hands steady for the water she poured into them, and drank it, before answering her.

"May Yahweh reward you for giving drink to a soldier," for he was willing she should know he could fight and had.

"A soldier!" the girl laughed and half turned

round to her companions, who were listening to the talk and smiling at the handsome young man. "A soldier! I thought you were a babies' nurse from your song!"

Again David felt the blood in his cheeks. She had the gift of stinging him with a delicious sense of shame—a glance could do it, and she could find sharp words that had the same effect. He felt a little child while she laughed at him. But suddenly, even as he looked at her with hot cheeks, the sensation of his own manhood came upon him, more strongly than anything else. After all, she was only a woman—let her know it.

He put out his hand and held her sleeve.

"I know other songs than that one," he said. "I know war songs . . . I know love songs . . . and I can teach others to sing. Would you like to learn that lullaby? . . . do you remember how it goes? . . . shall I sing it again? *'Close your eyes, little child, close your eyes' . . .*"

She pulled her sleeve from his grasp, lifted her pitcher, and without a word turned from him and hurried back to the town; but not before he had seen her mocking eyes cast down, and her own face hot and crimson.

He pursued one of the other women and detained her.

"Tell me, Mother, who is the girl with the red fringe to her dress?"

"Don't look after her, young man, she 's too great for you . . . that's Saul's youngest daughter, Michal."

Jonathan thought David was tired by his walk. It was a pity, for again there was news of a Philistine raid, and in the morning, very early, they were to start to meet them. Would David come too? David was quite willing; but he told Jonathan that he *was* tired, and if they were starting early he would rest now.

David may have been tired that evening, but in the morning he was in boisterous spirits. When he was in that mood nothing could withstand him; he soon had his own thousand as full of enthusiasm as himself, and the whole army caught the infection. The consequence was the complete rout of the Philistines and another personal triumph for David. Jonathan sent an advance messenger with the news to Saul; and the messenger must have told others besides Saul, for as the victorious soldiers marched back to Gibeah the women rushed out to meet them, singing and dancing, and playing on harps and flutes. Nor was it only the women of Gibeah who formed the crowd of those who

rejoiced—from all the neighboring towns they had thronged together to do honor to the new hero.

As David went along at the head of his thousand, and saw all the eyes of the assembly turned on him, their arms stretched toward him, and heard their acclamations with his name sounding most loudly, he felt a new thrill. This was a triumph in the eyes of a whole people—not only before a few men—a king—some soldiers—his relations—it was a whole nation that was coming out to welcome him—he was renowned now throughout the tribes of Israel and Judah. And it was as this conviction reached him that there came to him the words which with a startling suddenness brought back to him the promise of Samuel. The words were being sung by groups of women, who danced as they sang, and clapped their hands. They were getting nearer to the town of Gibeah—nearer to Gibeah of Saul—and still the women sang and laughed, and threw out their arms toward David. Now the procession was within the gates of the town—now they were coming under the walls behind which the king was sitting, and still they sang, almost intoxicated with joy and music. David heard them quite clearly; he looked straight ahead and kept his lips firm, but his eyes sparkled and his pulses throbbed; did

Saul hear them too? did Jonathan hear them? and what did they think? For these were the words of the women's song, echoed by hundreds of voices, hundreds of times:

> Saul hath slain his thousands,
> But David hath slain his ten thousands.

Chapter IX

That night Saul had another of his attacks. He had been violent and excited all the time of the rejoicings, and seeing Merab among the women who were waving green branches on the tops of the houses, he broke out into incoherent curses and abuse, calling her an unnatural daughter, a viper, a conspirator. When he had exhausted himself he flung himself down listlessly on the floor and would not speak. Jonathan ran for David, and begged him to come with his harp to see if he could help him, and David assented, though in his heart he felt a reluctance that he did not wish to recognize.

"Father," said Jonathan gently, "here is David —would you like him to play to you?"

Saul pushed Jonathan away, gave a growl that

was almost a groan, and hid his face in his hands. David, without speaking, began to play very softly on the harp, but he did not sing. Saul did not look up or move, but presently he said:

"Jonathan: I want Merab. Fetch her." Jonathan went out.

When he had gone David stopped playing; he crept a little nearer to Saul and touched the hem of the king's coat. Saul was still motionless, and David began to caress his foot, very lightly. At last he said: "My lord, the king, . . . my father. . . ."

Saul gave a deep sigh and looked up.

"My beautiful David, have you come to drive away my evil spirit? You have not been to see me for many, many weeks, and that is the reason he has seized upon me again. Why have you deserted me? Don't you love me any more?"

Before David could answer Jonathan returned, leading Merab with him. When she saw her father lying on the ground she gave a little cry and ran toward him.

"My father—my dear father—you are ill—you are unhappy. Forgive your poor Merab for offending you—God knows I never meant to. Let me try to help you—to make you more comfortable."

Saul pulled her down beside him and began stroking her head.

"It was the evil spirit who spoke roughly to you, Merab, not your father. I know I have no cause to be angry with you—you are a good girl and I love you dearly. Listen, and I will show you how much I love you. To-morrow—yes, to-morrow—I will give you in marriage. . . ."

He paused and looked up. It chanced that at that moment Jonathan, who had knelt down beside the crouching David, put his hand on his head and smiled at him. A shiver seemed to run through Saul; he went on, but his voice was harsh, and he spoke with an obvious effort.

"I say, I will give you in marriage—to-morrow —to Adriel the Meholathite—now go—I wish to be alone— Go, go—and you go too, Jonathan, and—"

The rest of the sentence was smothered as he dropped to the floor, on his face. They dared not stay—Jonathan gloomily took the bewildered Merab back to the women's room, and David went out with a sinking heart, though he kept on assuring himself there was no need to feel like that.

The next day David found an excuse for leaving Gibeah with his thousand and went roving up and down Philistia, burning, plundering, and killing.

After a few weeks he got news of a large force coming out against him, and hastily gathered his men together and returned to the mountain fastnesses of Israel. It was with some uneasiness, remembering doubtfully their last painful interview, that he presented himself, on his return, before the king, but Saul seemed well and cheerful, and greeted him affectionately. He told him that Merab was married and had gone off with her husband to Abelmeholah, near the Jordan.

"We had a great feast for the wedding," he said, with a laugh, "and it seems that Michal thinks *she* would like to be married too. . . . I hear she has cast her eyes on you, David."

David laughed too and said nothing, and after a few more words Saul dismissed him.

This friendly mood, however, did not last long. The men of David's thousand brought back innumerable tales of their leader's prowess, and soon all Benjamin was talking of nothing else. Saul alone seemed unwilling to listen to these tales, and became more and more depressed as time went on.

One evening David was sitting by himself under the shade of a group of olive trees when he saw approaching the well-known figure of Elihu. He was not particularly desirous of conversing with him, but he saw that he had been seen, and re-

signed himself. Sure enough Elihu stopped before him.

"May you be blessed of Yahweh, son of Jesse."

"And you, twice blessed," replied David.

"It is long since I have had an opportunity to ask after your health."

"I am well, by your favor."

"By the favor of Yahweh. . . . How is your father?"

"He sends you greeting."

"I have been longing to see him for many months."

"And he still more."

"Can I do anything to serve you?"

"May Yahweh prolong your life."

These necessary preliminaries having been gone through Elihu spread his mantle on the ground and sat down beside David.

"Well, David," he began, "you have certainly got on well since I went to Bethlehem to fetch you. Who would have thought it! Not so long ago and you were just keeping sheep in the desert, and now you are the captain of a thousand and the king's favorite! Some people are lucky, I must say."

"Yes," answered David, "I *have* been very fortunate. But I don't forget, Elihu, that it was

you who spoke a word to the king for me and brought me to Gibeah."

"It 's true enough I 've always stood your friend, David—in more ways than one—and not so long ago, either. Oh, I know how to slip in a word on my friend's behalf—a word in season is worth a speech to a sleepy man."

David wondered, rather anxiously, what Elihu's word in season could have been.

"Only yesterday," Elihu went on, "the king was considering how he could reward you for your prowess against the Philistines. I had been telling him how clever you are with your sling, and he walked up and down, muttering, 'What shall I do with him? What shall I do with him?' "

David stared at Elihu, aghast.

"I was revolving in my mind what to suggest when he turned sharp round on me and said, 'And *you* love him too, I 'll wager.' 'Oh, most certainly, my lord,' I answered; 'all the king's servants love David'—for you see, David, he spoke as if he was displeased, and it 's better not to cross him when he 's displeased—'We *all* love David,' I said. He laughed, and repeated after me, 'We *all* love David,' —and then went on, 'the king's servants, the king, the king's son. . . .' 'And the king's daughter,'

I put in without thinking what I was saying—and then stopped, for I was really in a fright at having said that, the more because it 's true enough, you young dog." Elihu broke off and winked portentously.

"And the king?" said David, in an agony.

"Well, I was relieved, I can tell you—he did n't seem a bit angry. He just looked at me and said, 'Michal? Yes. That might be a way of settling with him,'—settling with him, or settling him—I forget which way he put it. 'I might give him Michal.' 'Give him Michal!' I exclaimed, 'Why, it 's absurd! Why, his family is nothing at all—for him to become the king's son-in-law—and as for paying what would be right for the king's daughter, it 's ridiculous to think of it. Jesse is not a *poor* man, but he could no more afford to pay what you would require than he could give David a king's palace to live in.' "

David groaned inwardly and wondered what would come next.

" 'But,' said Saul," Elihu pursued, now in all the delights of eloquence, " 'but, Elihu, I might not need a money payment from such a young warrior. The heads of a hundred Philistines, now, would be worth gold to me.' 'In the name of Yah-

weh,' I answered, for I could n't help laughing at the thought, 'but it would take a stronger man than David to carry a hundred Philistines' heads up to Gibeah. All the same, the uncircumscised villains —there 's something else he might find . . . lighter to carry. . . .' 'Of course, of course,' he interrupted, 'heads, or . . . anything else—if he brings me a hundred he shall have Michal.' . . . Why, David, what 's the matter?"

David's eyes were bright as fire, and he leaped to his feet, smiling.

"It is a good plan, Elihu," he said. "How many men could kill a hundred Philistines and escape alive themselves? It is a good plan. King Saul shall have what he asks for, and I shall have Michal to wife,"—and, leaving Elihu sitting on the ground staring, David pulled up his coat and ran down the road to his dwelling place.

David was absent from Gibeah for three weeks. On his return he fetched Elihu and went with him into the king's presence. When he came out he was the betrothed of Michal.

Chapter X

There was but little delay between the betrothal and the marriage of David and Michal. Saul seemed to be more and more gloomy, but Jonathan was sure this was nothing, and that once the wedding festivities were over he would recover himself, and indeed rejoice whole-heartedly in having David for his son.

"As for me," he went on, "it is like a dream, that my sister should marry my brother . . . Dearest David, are you happy?"

David smiled.

"Yes, I am happy," he answered, and Jonathan smiled too.

The day of the marriage arrived. David left his house early and went to Abner's, where he was to spend the day. When he had gone Saul took Michal by the hand, and surrounded by women and servants they went from Saul's house to David's, which was but a little distance away. As they went along it was noticed by some of the onlookers that Saul hung his head, and muttered angrily from time to time, while Michal looked very white. When they reached David's house the women went to the upper room with the boxes containing the

bride's wedding clothes and jewels, and set about the lengthy and congenial task of arraying her for the feast. Michal sat silent and inert among them, and they pulled her about, washed, anointed, painted, and clothed her as if she had been a doll, chattering all the time, paying compliments, making appropriate jokes, giggling, and nibbling cakes and sweets, as noisy and merry as a party of magpies. At last everything was ready—they had only to wait for the arrival of the bridegroom; and gradually the talking and laughter died away—the women threw themselves down on the cushions and slept—while Michal sat upright and stiff, staring straight in front of her.

Meanwhile David was at Abner's house, where the young men were assembling. By an hour after sunset the room was full, and David glanced round to make sure they need wait for no one more.

"Everybody is here, are n't they, Abner?" he said.

"Yes—I think so—let's start—"

And David made the signal for setting out. In the courtyard the servants had ready a number of lighted torches; one of these was handed to each of the guests, and they began to form up in order, David and Abner in front. Just as David turned to the door, however, he was almost pushed aside

by some one hastily forcing his way in. The other guests exclaimed, both at his lateness and his roughness.

"Who is that, just when we're starting? The Edomite! Of course! No one but Doeg would thrust himself in like that—nearly knocking the bridegroom down! After coming so late, too!"

Doeg himself, a thickset, ugly, savage-looking fellow, stood in the doorway and scowled. Then he grinned, narrowing his yellow eyes and showing his brown teeth, and thrust his face into David's.

"So you thought you 'd go to your wedding without me! Trying to slip off before I arrived! No you don't—I shall be there!"

David stared at him in surprise, but said nothing. Some one at the back called out to ask what the delay was for, and Abner, declaring there had been enough dawdling, pushed Doeg on one side and shoved David forward and on into the street.

It was a beautiful night. The air was warm and still, the purple sky hung all over with stars. The streets, walls, and roofs of the houses were thronged with people come to see David pass to his wedding. The torches lit up their white dresses and eager faces, and David saw them pointing him out, and heard them whispering: "There he is! There he is!" As the procession moved along the

crowd grew denser, and presently began to move with them. Suddenly, far ahead, at the end of the street, David saw a cluster of lights moving to and fro, and finally coming toward him. It was the women coming out to welcome him and do him honor.

In a few minutes now they were in the house, sitting down to the wedding feast. Saul seemed to have recovered from his gloom, and, a red spot on each cheek, talked and laughed feverishly, avoiding David's eye. Jonathan was gay and affectionate; Abner full of uproarious jokes that made the women shriek and the men guffaw; Doeg looked sulky and scowling; and Michal sat rigid and silent, the length of the table between her and David.

At last the feast was over. The women rose and led the bride upstairs again to the bridal room. Presently they came down again, and now it was the turn of the men to go up with David. With shouts and laughter they pushed him through the doorway and then, still noisy and hilarious, trooped home through the streets of Gibeah.

David stood still in the doorway till he heard them leave the house, and then, with a deep breath, strode to the bed—Michal had been undressed and laid on it by the brideswomen. As David approached she leapt up and pushed him away.

"Wait! wait!" she gasped, breathlessly. "Don't begin that . . . you must listen. . . ."

David laughed. He thought she was bashful, and paused to give her time. Her next words enlightened him.

"Saul . . . my father . . . he means to kill you . . . you must fly. . . ."

His face darkened and he caught hold of her arm.

"What do you mean?" he said roughly, staring into her face, which he could see only faintly in the dim lamplight.

"He thought—to-night you won't be on your guard." Her face crimsoned. "He 's sending men to kill you—Doeg the Edomite—"

He dropped her arm and frowned. Then, without a word to her, he stepped as lightly as a cat out of the room and down the stairs.

In a moment he was back again.

"Yes." He spoke very softly, but so that every syllable was distinct. "The courtyard is full of men already. I can't get out that way. It must be by the window."

"Yes! yes!" she exclaimed eagerly, and pulling a rug off the bed began quickly knotting it to a bolt fastened to the wall near the window. He came to help her; for a few moments they stood together,

pulling the knots to make them firm, and as they did so his arm rubbed accidentally against her naked body. Obeying an impulse, he caught her in his arms and pressed her to him.

"My brave girl," he whispered passionately in her ear, "my king's daughter! I shall come back —and then—and then . . ."

She had yielded passively to his embrace and quivered at his passion and his hot words, but she recovered her self-control quickly, and slipped from his arms.

"Bring the teraphim," she said, pointing to the wooden block in the corner. He opened his eyes, but brought it, and obeying her gesture laid it on the bed. He instantly understood what she was after, and with a muffled laugh helped to arrange a goatskin and some clothes so as to give it the look of a sleeping man.

"Good-night, Oh fortunate bridegroom," he said with a smile and a bow to the teraphim, and turned to the window.

Michal gave a gasp—she was losing him—would he come back as he had said—would he escape?

"Where are you going?" she faltered, her voice on the edge of a sob.

He hesitated; then with decision:

"To Ramah—to Samuel," he said, and caught

hold of her again. "Wish me good fortune, my wife," and looked with smiling eyes into hers.

Her eyelids fell.

"Depart in peace, my lord," she said. "May Yahweh smooth your way—and may he give you a safe return, my love, my love. . . ."

David held her tightly and pressed kisses on her lips, her eyes, her throat; then he loosed her suddenly, and catching hold of the rug let himself down through the window.

It was a beautiful night. The stars hanging in the deep purple lit him on his way as he took the path that led him away from his bride—away from death.

Chapter XI

By the time David reached Ramah the sun had risen. At the sight of a stranger in the street the townspeople rushed out of doors to stare at him, and there were plenty able to direct him to Samuel's house, while others ran on in front to tell the Prophet that a visitor was coming to see him.

Samuel welcomed him with cordiality and insisted on his bathing and eating before anything

was said. Then when David was refreshed he took him to the roof of the house and asked for his story. To David the old Prophet seemed not to have changed at all since the day of his anointing; in spite of his own development and experience, the bright piercing eyes fixed so immovably on his still gave him a sensation of being seen through, and he told his tale cautiously, omitting some facts which might seem irrelevant, but not exaggerating what he did tell. Samuel watched and listened without speaking till David had finished. Even then he was silent for a while, but at last he spoke.

"It seems clear enough that Saul wishes to kill you; the devil that possesses him is not a devil of foolishness, and has not robbed him of his intelligence—he sees quite plainly that you are a danger to him."

Samuel paused suddenly and looked at David, who smiled uneasily.

"I have two pieces of advice for you," the Prophet went on. "In the first place, it is time you left Gibeah. You might escape with your life again—or you might not—it is unwise to run unnecessary risks when you have to run so many that are necessary. For a while you will no doubt be able to hide in the caves and deserts of Judea, but if your position becomes untenable I should recom-

mend you to take refuge—for a time—with the Philistines. You might put yourself under the protection of Achish of Gath."

David stared at the old man in amazement. He had a shrewd idea of the sort of "protection" the Philistines would afford him. Samuel went on:

"My other piece of advice is this. Though Saul is in a sense your enemy, there is a sense in which you are both united against the rest of the world—you are both the anointed of Yahweh. The people of this country do not as yet fully accept the sanctity—the set-apartness—of the king, for the monarchy is a new system with them, and a little thing might be enough to make them destroy it again. Remember that; and remember that every deed against Saul is a deed against yourself. . . . Now rest, for you have spent a sleepless night and need repose."

When David awoke he heard voices in conversation, and, opening his eyes, saw Elihu talking to the Prophet. The sight surprised him so much that he was instantly fully awake and on his feet, though he saw quickly from Samuel's face that there was no danger.

"The Lord be with you," said Elihu. "I come with a message from Jonathan," and he held out

a belt that Jonathan often wore, as a sign that this was so.

"Speak on," said David, taking the belt almost mechanically.

"Jonathan sends word that he has spoken with the king; that the devil has left him and that you may safely return. . . . But if I know women you may find that the devil has entered into Michal instead—he would certainly have entered my Rebekah if I had left *her* on the wedding night!"

"Be silent!" exclaimed Samuel sternly, and Elihu collapsed. "What are you going to do, David?"

"If Jonathan says the devil has gone . . ." began David, hesitating.

"Pshaw!" said Samuel. "Jonathan is talking nonsense—very likely the devil *has* gone—but how long will he stay away? He has left and returned more than once before now."

"Yes . . . that 's true . . ." David spoke slowly and tentatively. "But I think I 'll go back, all the same . . . You see, I left rather in a hurry. . . ."

Samuel's blue eyes were fixed on his face; presently he gave a laugh.

"Well—I see you 're determined—go back then, to your bride, and may Yahweh give you peace.

. . . No, Elihu, I want you to stay here, for I have a great many questions to ask you."

Samuel would not let David go until he had had a meal, and in consequence he did not reach Gibeah till the town gates were shut. He wrapped himself in his coat and slept under the wall, and in the morning went straight to find Jonathan.

"David! How glad I am you have come back! You don't know how terrible it is to be without you!" he cried when he saw him. "And all is well now—all is safe. My father swore to me—'As Yahweh liveth he shall not be put to death'—come, and let me bring you to him."

It was not to Saul that David wished to go, but to Saul's daughter. However he made no protest, but followed Jonathan into the king's room. When he lifted up his head from his obeisance he did not feel nearly as sure as Jonathan that the devil *had* gone. Saul's eyes were red, his hand trembled as he played with a long bronze spear, and his voice shook when he answered David's greeting. Jonathan also seemed surprised and taken aback by his father's condition, and presently suggested, rather nervously, that David should play the harp. Saul nodded, without speaking, and a servant was sent to David's house to fetch it.

Saul was sitting on the bench heaped up with

cushions, and David took his place opposite, with his back to the wall, while Jonathan sat beside him. As the player's hand swept the strings Saul became absorbed in the music, and the dark cloud that seemed to hang over him began to clear. But suddenly there came a change. What caused it? Did the devil return? Did David play too wild a chord? Did Jonathan caress David's arm? A shout that was almost a howl burst from Saul and the great bronze spear flew from his hand. David leapt aside and the spear stuck quivering in the wall. In another moment Saul had found and hurled another, lighter javelin; and at that David ducked and jumped for the door. Jonathan gave one glance at his father, who had fallen face downward on the bench, and rushed after his friend.

Chapter XII

David ran right out of the town of Gibeah and did not stop till he came to the open fields. He did not know what orders Saul might have given to his servants, and had no fancy for finding Doeg's sword in his ribs. When at last he stopped he

heard footsteps coming after him, and turned desperately and fiercely. But it was Jonathan.

They looked at each other in silence for a few moments, panting for breath; then David spoke.

"What does it mean, Jonathan? What have I done? How have I injured your father, that he should be so determined to take my life?"

"No, no!" cried Jonathan. "It is a mistake. It is not that he is determined to take your life, but only that at moments he is seized with some uncontrollable and meaningless rage. How can he resist the devil that inspires him? I am sure it is only by impulse that he acts like this, for if it was a deliberate plan he would have told me about it—he tells me everything he means to do, and why should he hide this if it were true? But it is not."

David shook his head.

"He knows that you love me. He says to himself: 'I will not tell Jonathan, for it would grieve him'—but as sure as Yahweh lives there is but a step between me and death."

Jonathan had begun to tremble violently. The horrible truth to which he had so long insisted on shutting his eyes was becoming too strong even for his passionate hopes. His knees suddenly felt weak and he sat down on the ground.

"Well," said he, faintly, "what shall I do? I will do whatever you want me to."

David sighed deeply. He, too, felt a wave of despair rush over him—the long struggle for his life with Saul, the plots and counterplots, the attacks and flights, all hidden under masks of friendship, madness, or respect, had suddenly become hateful to him. He must give it all up.

"Jonathan," he said, "you made a blood covenant with me. If I have done wrong kill me yourself—do not give me up to your father."

"Don't talk like that, David," answered Jonathan. "If I knew that my father intended mischief against you, of course I would tell you." There was a pause. Jonathan felt a ghastly sinking when David did not speak, and seizing hold of his coat whispered, his breath catching:

"You do believe that, don't you, David?"

David smiled and took Jonathan's hand in his. "Dear Jonathan, yes."

Jonathan breathed more freely; and immediately began to wonder if after all it could be true that his father wanted to kill David—beautiful, adorable David! No. It could n't be. It must have been his own fault—he must have been tactless and irritating. He would try again, and this time he

would make his father realize that there was no fault in David, and then all would be well. David would come back to Gibeah and they would all be happy—it was quite easy—his father would surely understand. He jumped up and caught David's arm.

"Listen," he said, "I have a plan. You shall stay out here to-day. To-morrow is the feast of the new moon, and you will be missed. If my father is angry then we shall know that he has determined to do you harm; but if he says nothing it will mean that you can come back in safety."

"Well," said David. He remembered Samuel's advice; and it was quite clear that Jonathan either could not or would not judge rightly of the king's mood. Yet somehow he did not dispute Jonathan's judgment or oppose his idea; he only wanted to arrange some way of communicating with him.

"How shall I know what answer your father makes?" he asked, and Jonathan had another plan ready.

"Do you go down in the morning to the mound by the tamarisk tree; I will come with my bow and arrow and shoot, as if at a mark, and if I say to my boy, 'Fetch the arrows; they are on this side,' then you will know that you can safely return, and

no harm is intended to you. But if I say, 'The arrows are beyond you,' then do not wait, but depart without delay—Yahweh has sent you away."

David weighed the proposal in silence. At last he looked up into Jonathan's face and spoke very earnestly.

"Jonathan, you will be very careful, won't you, and let me know truly if your father is angry?"

Again a wave of despair came over Jonathan. Everything seemed hopeless—his father unrelenting, David untrusting, he himself helpless. Yet, as he stood brooding over the misery of the situation, the strength of his love for David welled up in his heart and gave him strength and confidence.

"May I suffer all and more than all you suffer, if I conceal my father's anger from you. You shall go safely away and Yahweh shall be with you, as he was years ago with my father. And on your side, David, will you show kindness not only to me while I am alive, but after I am dead to the children of my house? The time will come when all your enemies will be destroyed from off the face of the earth; then remember your poor Jonathan, and be good to those that bear his name."

The blood rushed to David's cheeks. Jonathan, then, recognized clearly this thing that was in him,

which—he had always felt sure himself—would carry him through any difficulties that might beset him. Jonathan was appealing to him for help—assuring him of his own success—prophesying the downfall of his enemies. All this was sure to come, and worth, therefore, a few more struggles. His vitality reasserted itself; he turned, smiling, with shining eyes, to Jonathan.

"Yes," he said; "trust me, Jonathan. I shall always love you, and I will spare you and your sons in the day when I triumph."

After Jonathan had returned to Gibeah, David went and hid by the mound near the tamarisk, and there he stayed during the feast of the new moon. The time did not seem long to him. He was in a state of exhilaration in which he was sure that everything was favorable to him, and he dreamt many dreams and sang to himself songs of victory and rejoicing. The morning after the feast he heard Jonathan approaching with his boy, and made ready to come out and go back with him. Suddenly he stopped; he saw Jonathan shoot an arrow far over the boy's head and heard him say in a choking voice, "Is not the arrow beyond you?" and at the words his castles crashed to the ground. He stood quite still. Jonathan raised his voice and cried

out loudly and evidently with meaning: "Quick, make haste, make haste!" and understanding the hint David pulled his coat up through his belt, turned his back on Gibeah, and hurried southward as fast as he could.

PART II

IN THE WILDERNESS

Chapter I

WHAT was it that Samuel had said? That he would be able to hide in the caves of Judea and the Shephelah. . . . No doubt that would be the best plan. He could go through Bethlehem on his way, to tell his father and mother what had happened, and perhaps some of the Bethlehemites would join him. With one or two determined men to back him up he was ready to defy Saul, even if he should send after him and catch him—he would give a good account of himself before being dragged back to Gibeah. . . . But a necessary preliminary to all this was to secure a good sword—he had left the town without any weapon—and moreover he had not a proper meal since leaving Samuel two days ago, and the most urgent thing of all was something to eat. Vital as this point was becoming, he hurried on southward as fast as he could, dread-

ing pursuit, determined to put distance and a weapon between himself and his enemy. As he hurried along he approached the high hill of Nob —about two miles east of Jerusalem—and quickly decided what to do next.

"If I don't get something to eat at once—and a sword as well—Saul will send out word that no one is to help me, and I shall be made prisoner before I can reach Judea. . . . I 'll try the priests of the temple. I shall be surprised if I can't either frighten or bluff them into supplying me with my needs. . . ."

David was beginning to feel faint, and it was with difficulty that he struggled up the steep hillside. He passed through the town of the priests, on the slope of the hill, and pushed on up to the high place, with its sanctuary and temple. As he came near the holy buildings there was the usual commotion and chattering, and presently the priest, Ahimelech, came out to receive the king's son-in-law.

Ahimelech was an elderly man, thin and bent, and even during the salutations David came to the conclusion that he was nervous and would prove amenable to a firm attitude.

"Yes—yes—" said Ahimelech, "certainly—the Lord be with you—may you find favor in his eyes

—I have prospered, by the grace of Yahweh—but why are you all alone? Surely you have not come by yourself?"

"Of course not," said David. "Come a little further off so that we are not overheard. . . ."

They moved together toward the temple.

"Well—your escort? Where are they? Have you come on a message from my lord the king? Is there anything you want? I 'm afraid I can do very little. . . ."

"Yes, I am on the king's business," answered David, "but he gave me strict injunctions to keep it secret—I am not to tell any one what it is."

"Certainly, certainly," said Ahimelech, "I should not dream of asking. I hope you don't think I am one to pry into the king's private affairs."

"As to my men, I am to meet them a little way from here—but I can't tell you exactly where it is to be."

"I should n't be so indiscreet as to ask—doubtless you have your own reasons for acting as you do."

"I have," thought David, and went on aloud: "I want some food for the men who are with me —let me take anything you have—five loaves of bread and anything else that is handy."

Ahimelech's long face grew longer.

"Bread? But I have n't any. There will be some baked this evening, though."

"This evening won't do," said David decidedly, feeling how very empty his stomach was. "You *must* give me some at once—do you hear?"

"Yes—yes—certainly," quavered Ahimelech. "It 's very awkward—I really don't know—but you shall have some—only be patient. . . ."

"How can I be patient when I am on the king's business? Come, Ahimelech, don't keep me waiting any longer."

"Well, what can I do? Let me see—well, there 's the holy bread—the presence bread—but I can't give that to you unless you 've been purified. . . ."

"Now you know, Ahimelech, that to go on a military expedition we *must* be purified—it 's three days since we went in to the women—and the holy bread will only purify our bags afresh. Come along, and give me what you 've got."

Ahimelech groaned, but David's hand was on his shoulder, and he allowed himself to be propelled toward the temple. As they approached it David saw a figure that seemed familiar squatting on the ground of the precincts; when he got near he recognized it as Doeg the Edomite.

"The Lord preserve you," said David, and

touched his forehead. Doeg only grunted and turned away, huddling himself up in his cloak.

"Doeg takes part in a sacrifice to-day," explained Ahimelech. "He stayed here last night to purify himself—but I shall be glad when he goes away—I don't know why it is—he makes my flesh creep. He speaks so loud, and he 's always thumping with his spear on the ground."

By this time they were at the temple door. They stepped carefully over the raised threshold and entered. On a table in the space before them was a pile of thin cakes of unleavened bread, and these, with a good deal of lamenting and head-shaking the priest handed over to David. David's mouth watered, but he dared not fall upon the bread in Ahimelech's presence lest he should suspect something.

"There 's one other thing," he said, eyeing his prize longingly. "Have you a spear or sword you can let me have? I left Gibeah in such a hurry that I brought nothing with me."

"The sword of Goliath the Philistine is here," answered Ahimelech, "but that is the only one."

"Give it to me," cried David eagerly; "there is no sword like it—fetch it quickly."

The priest turned away sighing to fetch the

weapon. David glanced quickly round him, faced about, and began devouring a piece of bread, trusting Ahimelech would not notice what he was doing. He was munching wolfishly at a bit he held in his hand when he glanced up, and saw a face looking in through the door. It was Doeg; the ugly yellow eyes stared at him for a moment, and then a ferocious grin covered the Edomite's whole face. It instantly withdrew, but David had a sensation that he had been found out by some one who would make use of it if he could.

At that moment Ahimelech returned, carrying the great sword of Goliath wrapped in a linen cloth. David took it, removed the covering, and immediately the sight of the beautiful iron blade banished everything else from his thoughts. He held it in one hand and ran the tips of his fingers along the edge; he grasped the hilt and swung it to feel the balance, then with a sigh of pleasure he fastened it to his belt. While he was doing this another idea occurred to him.

"Now, Ahimelech," he said, as he straightened himself, "you shall inquire of Yahweh for me where I am to go when I leave the temple—whether it is to be the first place I have thought of or the second place," and he thought to himself the first place is

Adullam, and the second place is the wilderness of Maon.

This time the priest made no protest. He was quite accustomed to consult the oracle for Saul and Saul's messengers, and not suspecting for a moment that David did not come officially from the king he went off to the ephod and made his preparations for casting the sacred lot. When all was ready there was a pause, and presently David heard him say:

"Oh, Yahweh, God of Israel, thy servant David asks where he shall go—if to the first place in his thoughts give Urim; but if it should be to the second place in his thoughts give Thummim." Silence—followed by a shriek from the priest, who came tumbling out, his teeth chattering and his hands trembling.

"Stop, stop," called David, catching hold of him as he tried to rush out of the temple. "Where are you going? What happened? Was it Urim or Thummim? The first place or the second?"

"Oh, oh!" shrieked Ahimelech. "Such a thing has never happened before. I have known Yahweh to give *no* answer—but this time—this time he gave Urim *and* Thummim!"

David dropped his arm and considered. "You

said 'if the first place give Urim and if the second give Thummim'? And he gave both. The oracle is clear—wherever I go Yahweh will protect me—because," he added in his heart, "because I am his anointed. Ahimelech," he said aloud, "it is a sign of good fortune."

Ahimelech shook his head. He knew better. He knew it was because he had bungled the business, and that far from being a sign of good fortune it was a sign of disaster. But David did not wait to reason with him. He strode out of the temple, and with sparkling eyes and head erect swung out of the precincts and down the hill, ignoring the malevolent scowling figure of Doeg the Edomite.

Chapter II

Directly David got out of sight of the priests' city he found some shade under a patch of mulberry trees and ate as much as he wanted of the holy bread; he had filled his water bottle at the well of Nob, so he could have a deep drink too. The meal over, he rolled onto his face and slept profoundly. He woke with the suddenness and com-

pleteness of perfect health, and was instantly up and on the way to Bethlehem. As he walked he kept turning over in his mind the events of the morning, chuckling at the thought of Ahimelech's terror, and wondering at the strangeness of the oracle of Yahweh. As he smiled to himself over these recollections there seemed to swim before his eyes the savage, snarling face of Doeg. His heart sank. The Edomite appeared an incarnation of the ruthlessness of physical violence—a ruthlessness to which the forces within himself seemed utterly opposed, but as yet too weak to alter or affect in any way. Try as he might to smother this reflection, it nevertheless left a certain discomfort in his mind.

He reached Bethlehem just as the evening meal was starting. They were all surprised and pleased to see him, and his father made him sit down beside him and eat heartily before allowing any questions. At last, when David's appetite began to be appeased, Jesse said with a smile:

"So you are married to the king's daughter now!"

Somehow David was staggered. Was it really only five days since his abortive wedding? So much had happened since, that to him the episode seemed stale; he had forgotten that it would be the last news of him his people would have had, and that it would

be filling their thoughts. But *he* could not speak of it.

"Yes."

He spoke gloomily and coldly—pushed out his underlip and stared at the floor. There was no invitation in his behavior to pursue the subject, and Jesse glanced at David's mother and was silent.

Presently David looked up and spoke.

"I have lost the favor of Saul. He wants to kill me, and I am flying for my life."

This was a bombshell, and the whole table gasped.

"My son," said Jesse, recovering himself, "you must tell us more than this. We have heard of nothing but your success—how you became the king's armor-bearer, the captain of a thousand, the husband of the king's daughter—and now you tell us you are flying for your life. How can this be?"

"I hardly know, myself," replied David. "The king has an evil spirit. . . ."

"We have heard, too," mused Jesse, "of nothing but your victories over the Philistines—you are quite a hero among the tribesmen."

"Perhaps," suggested David, "if I had not found

so much favor with them I should not have lost so much favor with Saul."

Jesse pondered, gazing thoughtfully at his son. At last he made a gesture with his hand as if dismissing the subject.

"However that may be, you will have some plan of escape, and will want help from your kinsfolk," he said.

"Yes," answered David; "I had thought of going to Adullam—you know the big cave there? One could lie hidden a long while. And if any of the Judeans joined me"—he looked sideways at his father to see if he approved of this, but the old man's face remained inscrutable—"we could fortify the hill, and have a fine camp there."

"H'm," said Jesse, "so you want men to join you . . . you think Saul will send out and try to take you?"

"Well, I think so," said David, "and anyhow he will very likely send after you. He 'll make sure you know where I am and are helping me and will want to put a stop to that. I don't believe you 'll be safe in Bethlehem. . . ."

"Your mother and I are too old to become outlaws, David. You may fix on Adullam now, but if Saul is really set on your capture you won't be

able to stay there long—it will be first one place and then another, through the hot days and the cold. *We* can't wander about like that. As for the young men, it 's different. You 'd better go and talk to them about it—they can do as they like."

With this permission David got up and moved to a corner of the room where he was soon surrounded by the younger members of the household, all agog to hear his adventures and his plans for the future.

"Well," said Joab, after hearing what David had to say as to Saul's continued hostility, "well, you seem to have got yourself into a lot of difficulties, David, and as far as I can see you 've involved all of us. The king won't leave a man of Jesse's household in peace, I should say, and if my grandfather consents, it appears to me we 've no choice to go off to."

"You heard what my father said," answered David.

"Yes," said Asahel, eagerly. "*I 'll* come with you, David."

David laughed, but he was pleased at Asahel's eagerness.

"Look here," said Abishai. "I don't see why we should be the only ones to join you. There are

plenty of men about who aren't too well pleased with the way things are going, and who would come out to any one who had a chance of protecting them from attack."

"Not pleased with the way things are going?" David was n't sure what he meant.

"Oh," laughed Joab, scornfully, "he means fellows like his dear Elhanan and Eleazar, the sons of Dodai. It seems Dodai got into debt, and when he died his fields were seized by the creditors; so Elhanan and Eleazar are landless men, and have nothing to do but rove up and down the country, and threaten every one in authority for not getting their fields back for them."

"They 're splendid fighters," said David, delighted at the idea of enrolling such supporters; "I know them quite well. Do you really think they 'd come, Abishai?"

"Yes, I dare say," answered Abishai, rather sulky with Joab, "but I was n't thinking of them. There 's a Hittite, a man called Ahimelech, who 's here with his young brother Uriah. He 's got some grievance against Saul—I don't exactly know what it is, but I believe he 'd join any enemy of the king's —he talks of going over to the Philistines."

"Just the sort I want," said David. "If you

know any others of that kind, do let us have them —only we must be sure they 're sound—that 's the main thing."

After a few more words it was agreed that David and Joab should go on to Adullam the next morning and that Abishai and the other men of the household should follow with any suitable friends they could gather together.

"I am anxious about you and my mother," said David, when telling his father what had been settled. "I will think over what I can do for you— I don't at all like leaving you alone in Bethlehem."

Jesse smiled. "Thank you, my son," he said; "it appears to me you had better be anxious about your own affairs—you don't seem to have managed them as well as we hoped."

"Oh, David," cried Asahel, suddenly, "is that an *iron* sword? Do tell me how you got it! May I look at it?"

"Yes," said David, unbuckling it for the boy to look at. "It 's a beauty. It belonged to Goliath of Gath."

"Oo-oo-oo, David! And did you get it from him when you killed him with your sling?"

"I? I never killed him—it was Elhanan the son of Jair who killed him— Now, Asahel, I want to go to sleep."

Chapter III

"How old do you suppose my father is?" asked David of Joab as they went toward Adullam the next morning.

"How should I know?" said Joab. "He 's an old man."

"Do you know how old he was when I was born?"

"Why should I? Oh, I do remember my mother saying *she* was born the day he was thirty."

"And I am nearly twenty-three, and twenty-two years younger than Zeruiah . . . that would make him seventy-four, would n't it?"

"I dare say—what do I care?—and why should you care? Any one can see he 's an old man."

"Yes. . . . I don't think it 's a bit safe to leave him at Bethlehem."

Joab grunted. David was very queer sometimes, worrying his mind about perplexing subjects that did n't affect what one did . . . no wonder he got himself into trouble.

After a while they came to bare, chalky hills, and here David began to look carefully for the cave he had in his mind. He scanned the countryside, and at last went to the base of a hill about 500 feet

high, in which a black opening could be seen. He peered in, and then turned and shouted to Joab.

"Come on! This is the place."

The cave had two large chambers leading one into the other, each about 130 yards long. The inner chamber had pillars in it, supporting the dome-shaped roof, and—a feature of priceless value—a spring of fresh water. These big chambers were surrounded by smaller ones, so that it seemed to David, as he looked around, a perfect place for concealing a band of men and all the stores and weapons they would need. When they came out of the cave David took Joab to the top of the hill and showed him how he would fortify it if he had enough men.

"That 's the road to Hebron—Hareth lies in that direction, about three miles off. There 's Philistia—did you ever see such rich fields, Joab?—and Keilah is this way."

"Well, if the Philistines think of raiding Keilah we could do them some damage."

"Yes, if we get enough men together—I suppose we might be a hundred altogether."

"A hundred! Why, David, what are you dreaming of! If every man we thought of came we should n't be twenty-five."

David did n't answer.

"Perhaps not," he thought to himself. "I dare say it 's all nonsense, but I can't help thinking . . . when people hear I 've fled from Saul . . . there 'll be some who 'll be on my side and not on his . . . though he *is* the king . . . at present."

And it was not long before this optimism was more than justified. Before the day was over a dozen men arrived who had heard a rumor that David was making a camp in the neighborhood and wanted to join it. Early the next morning Abishai appeared with thirty more who had insisted on coming, and the news that many more were anxious to come but that he had refused them until he heard David's wishes. David was of opinion that the more men they had the better, and that every one who seemed likely to be a useful fighter and would bring a certain quantity of stores should be admitted to the band. By the next day he had decided he could not run the risk of leaving his parents in Bethlehem, and giving Joab command of the camp in his absence, he set off for home.

On the twelve-mile walk he was revolving different plans for their safety and well-being, and finally decided that if they agreed he would go over the Jordan to Moab and see if his Moabite kinsfolk would take charge of them for a while.

"My father has so often told me of his grand-

mother, Ruth the Moabitess," he said to himself, "and how she married a Judean in Moab and came back to Bethlehem with Naomi, her mother-in-law. . . . They will not have forgotten her there, and perhaps will be willing to give protection to her grandson. And beyond the Jordan they will be safe from Saul."

When he reached Bethlehem he found Jesse, rather alarmed at finding himself with no young men around him, quite ready to agree to David's suggestion. The journey to Moab and back would take seven or eight days, and during that time he could be making his final arrangements and would not feel he was being hurried or taken at a disadvantage.

David occupied the time of his journey to Moab with many long daydreams. First there was his reception by the king—but that had to be very vague, for he did n't know at all what the Moabites would be like. Then his mind went back to Saul, and he wondered what he was doing—whether he was very angry at his flight—whether he had quarreled with Jonathan—what Michal thought about it. It was too bad he had had to give her up too soon, but he would win her again, and she should be his . . . her beautiful eyes and her clear, mocking voice. . . . Yes, Michal should be his wife,

and he would conquer the Philistines and make himself king (Saul conveniently vanished from his mind for the time being); and Jonathan? . . . dear Jonathan should eat meat at his table. He rested on that thought for a little while. After all, before—not so long ago, was it?—he himself had been the servant of Jonathan's father, and all Jonathan's affection for him had worn the appearance of condescension. How exquisite it would be for Jonathan to have nothing—nothing at all—but to owe everything—his food, his clothes—his life itself—to David!

"I will be all kindness," he thought to himself; "he shall do just what he likes, but everything will come from me, instead of coming from him. . . ." If there was anything painful or humiliating in this to the generous, princely Jonathan, he shut it from his mind, and reveled in the feeling of his own magnanimity.

His mission to Moab was amply successful. The kinship was at once recognized and hospitality and protection offered; no doubt the fears of Saul that David did not hide from the king helped an understanding with a victim of Saul's youthful generalship. Jesse and his wife were to be under the king's own care, and one of his own camels was lent to David to help the old people through the trying

ways of the desert. By this aid David got back to Bethlehem quicker than he had thought would be possible, and hearing no news of Saul left Joab still in charge at Adullam and himself escorted his parents to their place of refuge. Then at last he returned to Adullam.

There he found nearly two hundred men encamped. Among them was a man called Gad, who told David that he was a prophet and had been sent by Samuel to join him. He advised David to leave a store of food in the caves, guarded by half a dozen men, and himself with the bulk of his followers to move into the forest of Hareth, about three miles off. David thought it over, and coming to the conclusion that it would be a better center for procuring food and for watching Saul's movements, agreed with Gad, and the camp was struck.

Chapter IV

David had not been long in the forest of Hareth before he had another message from Samuel. He was told that the messenger had arrived and wanted to see him alone, so going a little way apart from the others he gave orders for him to come.

The man turned out to be Elihu. He was tired and disheveled, and had evidently traveled at a great pace. In spite of his weariness he begged David to listen to his story at once, and declared he could wait for food and rest till it was told.

"Samuel said I was to hurry; of course I went to Ramah first with the tale, but he would n't let me stop a minute after he 'd heard it. He was in an awful state—I don't know when I 've seen him like that—nothing one could do would keep him quiet. I kept saying: 'What is there to be excited about? Everybody knows Doeg is a spitfire.' But he went on muttering, 'Saul means business this time, and David must know.' "

At the sound of Doeg's name David began to be uneasy.

"Tell me, Elihu," he said, "tell me the whole story from the beginning."

"I really don't think there 's much to tell," answered Elihu. "It 's true Saul has sent off for Ahimelech and the priests—but you know what Saul 's like—hot one moment and cold the next—what a devil he must have!"

"Well, but go on, Elihu,—tell me what happened."

"What happened? Why nothing would have happened if Doeg had not pushed his oar in—

then Saul was naturally annoyed—though goodness knows he was annoyed enough before. . . ."

"But Elihu, I don't understand a word you 're saying. What did Doeg do, and why was Saul annoyed, and where were they, and when did it happen?"

"As for why Saul was annoyed, *you* ought to know that best. It happened two days ago while he was sitting under the tamarisk tree, giving judgment. Some one had brought up an old woman, who had been telling fortunes, and you know how angry that always makes him. '*Yahweh* is the god of the Israelites, you old witch, and if any one wants to know the future he should get the priests to consult the sacred lot—always with the king's permission, of course. I won't have you going to Chemosh or Dagon or heaven knows what other Baal, and insulting Yahweh by leaving him quite out of it. But you know all this yourself and you know the law says you 're to be stoned.' Then, in the middle of all the shrieking and shouting, some one came running up to Saul and began talking to him, very excited. When he could be heard, Saul turned to all the Benjamite leaders who were standing round, and I must say he looked black. 'So it 's Adullam, David has gone to,' he said, 'and how

many weeks is it before I find *that* out? But you 're all in league with him and my fine son Jonathan,' he said, 'and plotting to lie in wait for me and kill me and take my kingdom. Who else among you have been helping him and concealing him?' Well, we all hung our heads, and did n't say anything, and felt uncomfortable, and he began again: 'Come, I say, which of you know what David has been doing all this time?' and then—would you believe it?—out came that ugly Edomite, Doeg."

Elihu paused; and David, who had been listening impatiently to the long preamble, was now impatient for the tale to continue.

"'*I* saw the son of Jesse,' he said," went on Elihu, "'coming to Nob, to Ahimelech, the son of Ahitub.' 'What!' yelled Saul; 'you saw him at Nob and never told me!' 'I did n't know you wanted to know,' said Doeg, more like a dog snarling than a man talking, 'but *I* did n't help him. It was Ahimelech who gave him food and Goliath's sword and consulted Yahweh for him.' At that I thought Saul would have had a fit. But he didn't; he sent some messengers to Nob to bring Ahimelech and all the priests to Gibeah, and in the hurly-burly I slipped off to Ramah."

David groaned. It was clear that some calam-

ity was impending; could he do anything to stop it? Or would he be involved?

"Did Samuel send any message, besides?" he asked.

"Yes," said Elihu. "He said, 'Tell him to remember that the king of Israel needs the priests of Yahweh to interpret the wishes of the god of Israel.' And now, David, I must have something to eat."

David, left alone, began walking up and down pondering the tale he had heard, and Samuel's cryptic words, *The king of Israel needs the priests of Yahweh.* But if in some way Saul were to antagonize them? Were not Samuel's words a hint that David, as future king of Israel, should try to get them on his side? But how could he do that? They had all been summoned to Gibeah—what would come of it? As he walked up and down in deep reflection, the fringe of his consciousness became aware that from time to time something moved in the bushes. At first he did not heed it; but gradually, as the intensity of his meditation relaxed, he became more and more conscious of sound and movement. At last, convinced that some living creature was there, he stopped, and said in a commanding voice:

"Come out from your hiding place."

There was a pause, and then a haggard, ragged, bleeding figure emerged from the underwood and with a cry of "Protection!" flung itself at David's feet.

David stepped back, amazed and uneasy.

"Who are you?" he said, gazing narrowly at the wretched-looking creature, to see if he could recognize it.

"Abiathar, son of Ahimelech," answered a gasping voice.

"Of Ahimelech, son of Ahitub?" exclaimed David, with wide eyes.

"He is killed, and eighty-five other priests—I am the only one left alive."

"But how did it happen?"

"He sent for us all to Gibeah and said we had plotted with you against him. My father swore he had only cast the sacred lot for you because you were the king's son-in-law and that he knew nothing of any plot, but Saul would hear nothing—he was like a wild beast. He ordered the soldiers to kill us, but they refused, and then Doeg the Edomite cut them all down—my father and eighty-five others. . . ." Abiathar shuddered and put his hands in front of his eyes.

David was trembling with the helplessness of his rage.

"And you? How did you get here?"

"I don't know—they did n't notice me—I managed to get to Nob, and found the ephod—my father had left it behind—then I heard Saul's soldiers coming into the city—they were burning and killing there too, but I escaped them, and I am here . . . with the ephod."

David saw that the man was holding something carefully under his torn clothes—something that rose and fell with the violent heaving of his palpitating heart. He stooped over him and took him in his arms.

"I knew it when I saw Doeg at Nob—I knew he would tell Saul. And it is I who am the cause of your kinsfolk's death."

"No," panted Abiathar; "it was Saul—may Yahweh punish him! . . . But I am afraid . . . he will send after me too. . . ."

The king of Israel needs the priests of Yahweh. Ah! it was clear now.

"Abiathar," said David, "stay with me. Don't be afraid. He who seeks your life seeks mine; but with me you will be safe."

Chapter V

When the summer came on, David, after consulting Gad and Joab, moved back to Adullam. The caves were an agreeable shelter from the heat of the sun, and the spring solved the constantly recurring difficulty of providing water for a large troop of men. Moreover, David had an idea that the Philistines would be making incursions into the Israelite country, and Adullam seemed a good strategic position for watching them and, if occasion should warrant, harrying the invaders on his own account.

This occasion seemed, however, unlikely to arise. David's men were uneasy at the idea of an attack from Saul, and were more in the mood for defensive warfare or even for flight and hiding than for being in any way aggressive; and the reputation of the Philistine army did not invite attack on it.

One of the first things David had done on taking to the wilderness was to organize a body of scouts to keep him fully informed of what was going on in the countryside. These scouts were some of the most daring and most intelligent of his men; they went everywhere and knew to some extent how to deduce cause from effect. They even penetrated as far as Benjamin, and David knew pretty well what

Saul was doing and could guess at what he was intending. For some time past the scouts of the nearer neighborhood had been bringing him news of the Philistines—of their assembling troops of men, of their descents on the corn-fields and threshing floors of Keilah, and of their skirmishes with the men of Keilah over the plunder. David got more and more restless, and at last could not refrain from broaching the matter to some of his captains.

"Listen to this, Benaiah and Ahimelech," he said one morning: "Asahel and Ahimelech's brother Uriah got nearly as far as Keilah last night and they tell me there has been another Philistine raid on them."

"The uncircumcised thieves!" exclaimed Benaiah, fiercely.

Ahimelech shook his head and said nothing. Joab had come up while David was speaking and he joined in.

"Without having been as far as the valiant Asahel and Uriah, *I* can tell you the Philistines will go on raiding Keilah till the end of the summer or till there is nothing left to raid—what is there to stop them?"

"What indeed?—unless we were to do so."

Joab snorted and Benaiah stared.

"We, David? Why, we 're afraid of an attack

from Saul—how could we possibly attack the Philistines?"

"You won't get many of the men to think of such a thing," said Ahimelech, gloomily. "I should n't dream of it myself—it 's a mad absurdity." David sighed. He saw that in this mood such a venture *would* be an absurdity, and yet his heart yearned for it and he tried desperately to devise some means of spurring them to enthusiasm in the apparently impossible task. All day he walked about in a state of gloomy abstraction and saw no way out of his difficulty. He began to wish there was some one he could consult—but who was there? Joab would be sure to disagree with anything he suggested. Benaiah was a good fighter, but always wrong in his ideas; Ahimelech the Hittite had no particular feeling for the Israelites; Asahel was too young and enthusiastic. But who was there he had ever been able to consult? Who had ever given him advice that had been of service to him? Not the fickle Saul—not the love-blinded Jonathan. Then there flashed into his mind—Samuel! Ah! that was a different matter altogether! He had not always understood Samuel's advice, but he had always felt in his heart that when he did not it was because it sprang from a deeper source than he had knowledge of, and that the nearer he got to the hidden

truth of facts the clearer the meaning would become. His thoughts turned back to the last message he had received. *The king of Israel needs the priests of Yahweh.* . . . Was there not something there that would help him? . . . That was not all the message. . . . *The king of Israel needs the priests of Yahweh to interpret the wishes of the God of Israel.* . . . Suddenly it was clear. How could he have been such a fool as not to see it before? He was as stupid as Benaiah, as great a heathen as Ahimelech. *Yahweh* was the solution of the puzzle, and he held Yahweh's interpreters, Abiathar and the sacred ephod, in the hollow of his hand.

It was not long before he found Abiathar and explained the situation to him.

"You see, Abiathar, the men are afraid to attack the Philistines; but if they knew it was the will of Yahweh that would be another matter. You must throw the sacred lot in front of them and inquire of Yahweh whether we are to go or not—I am *sure* we ought to, but they must realize that the Lord wishes it before they will consent. Do you understand?"

Abiathar understood perfectly.

The whole business went off successfully, according to program. The men were assembled and David explained why they were consulting the

Lord; there was a certain amount of muttering, but when Yahweh declared emphatically, in answer to two leading questions, that they were to attack the Philistines and that he would deliver them into David's hand, they no longer disputed their leader's decision. David was in the highest spirits; he had got his way, he was going into battle, and above all he had acquired a new power—that of getting Yahweh to back up his wishes. It opened up a limitless vista of possibilities, and he rushed upon the enemy with such an irresistible tempest of enthusiasm that he drove them before him like frightened chickens. Keilah was relieved, and he took his followers into it, partly to remind the Philistines not to attack it again, partly to reward his men and rest them from the strenuous life of foraging in the open country.

The rest was not for long. He soon heard from his scouts that Saul was preparing an army, which, it was widely reported, was meant to trap him in Keilah. Reluctant to incur the odium of a personal decision to return to the hardships of the desert, David again called in the services of Abiathar, and the oracle declared that Saul was marching against them and that the men of Keilah would give them up to him when he came. There was nothing for it but to escape from the walled town while there

was yet time, and David led his grumbling but unprotesting followers into the wilderness of Maon.

Chapter VI

David was more than two years in Maon. His troops grew, till he had as many as six hundred fighting men, many of these with wives and children. As the time passed he found himself more and more able to control them, and he took advantage of this to organize them into groups under definite officers, and to insist on a certain rigidity of discipline. For instance, the matter of supply he kept entirely in his own hands. He tolerated no plundering of the neighbors either from his own men or any stray brigands, but at stated times he himself sent a formal request for a supply of food. By dint of careful arrangement, strict economy and occasional raids on the Philistines, supplemented by continual hunting expeditions, they managed to get along; but at times none escaped hunger, and if any of their sources of supply had been cut off many of them would have starved.

In the first year of his stay in Maon David had a terrible blow. Elihu came over to visit him and

told him that Samuel was dead. Though the Prophet was too old for this to be surprising, David somehow felt the news was unexpected. Samuel had seemed to his imagination eternal and unchanging—he could no more think of him as young than he could think of him as dead. He knew, moreover, that the loss would be a serious one to him, and that from henceforward he would have to depend on himself alone—excepting, of course, for the oracle of the Lord.

One morning, about a year after Samuel's death, David sent for Abishai, Asahel, Uriah the Hittite, and seven other young men, and gave them a commission.

"Abishai, could you take command of the party? I want you to go up to Carmel, to the house of Nabal, the rich farmer—I hear he is holding the feast of the sheep shearing—and greet him from me. Remind him that his shepherds have been here in Maon all the grazing time, and that we have done them no harm and not allowed any others to harm them; and ask him to let us have what he can spare."

"Right," said Abishai. "What ought it to be? Five sheep and a hundred loaves? Is that about it?"

"Yes, I should think so," said David. "I think

he might throw in some parched corn and some fruit, but don't quarrel about that."

"The old scoundrel!" burst out Asahel. "He could afford twice as much if he chose, but you see if he does n't grudge us every grain and every raisin he lets us have. Don't argue with him, Abishai—just take what you want if he does n't give it peaceably."

"Abishai," said David, sternly, "you are to do my message exactly and politely. If there is any trouble about Nabal's gifts, come straight back to me and report—if any of you ten strikes a blow or speaks a rude word, you 'll hear of it from me. Do you understand?"

Carmel lay about a mile north of Maon, but no one expected the young men back before night, for it would take a little while to prepare the gifts, and they were sure to be invited to join the feast. David's camp, therefore, was all in a fluster when an hour after starting out Abishai and his companions reappeared, carrying no gifts, very angry, and shouting for David. David came forward quickly and asked what had happened.

"David," said Abishai, "by the life of Yahweh I spoke what you told me, and we got nothing but insults for our pains—he will give us nothing."

"Nothing?" David frowned and looked down.

Then, raising his eyes: "You did not provoke him?"

"Not he!" cried the impetuous Asahel. " 'David greets you,' says he: 'Who 's David?' says the old ruffian, 'and who are you? runaway slaves?' 'Whoever we are,' says Abishai, 'we 've been keeping your sheep from thieves and never touched one ourselves—ask your young men if it 's not so—and all we ask is what you can spare from the feast.' 'Pooh,' cried the old man, quite red with anger. 'Do you think I 'm going to give the bread and meat and wine I prepared to feast the sheep shearers with to a lot of vagabonds from I don't know where?' "

"Yes," interrupted Abishai, "and I saw the others were getting angry, so I said no more and came straight back to you."

"Asahel," said David, shortly, "call Joab."

Joab was not far off and was soon summoned. David looked up; his eyes were wide and his lips thin, and Joab noticed that his hand was shaking.

"Listen to me, Joab," he said. "This man Nabal has insulted me and refused me anything in my necessity, though I protected his flocks all the time they were in Maon. He has returned me evil for good. Now, may Yahweh do so to me and more also if by to-morrow I leave alive out of his household one man-child."

Joab grunted.

"You 're right this time, David," he said; "if you let this fellow off lightly you 'd never get as much as a lamb from any one else in these parts again. . . . When will you start, and how many men will you take?"

"A hundred and fifty," said David grimly; "we 'll start two hours after sunset."

"When it 'll be quite dark and Nabal's men will be drunk," whispered Asahel to Uriah. "Well! we shall see something to-night."

There was no moon when they started, and David ordered absolute silence. He was going to make sure, so far as it lay in his power, that his threat was executed to the letter. At first they had to go up for a few minutes, then down for half a mile and again up to Nabal's house. Everything was in darkness till they reached the summit, when Asahel rushed back to tell David they thought they saw a light moving among the trees on the opposite slope. David at once came to the front of the troop and they crept down the hill. As they were reaching the bottom there came down toward them a man carrying a torch, and behind him another leading two heavily laden asses, and behind him a veiled figure also on an ass. David sprang quickly past the torchbearer, who was blinded by his own light,

and catching hold of one of the asses called out sharply and imperiously:

"Who are you? What 's all this?"

The startled man gave a yell and dropped the bridle. Before David could speak again the veiled figure dismounted, ran toward him, and fell on the ground before him. He felt a gentle pull to his coat as it was grasped by the suppliant hands; he felt warm, soft lips pressed on his naked feet.

"A woman!" he thought, and instantly turned to the man with the torch. "Now fellow," he cried roughly, "don't try running away—there are two hundred men over there all ready to cut you down if you move a yard from here."

The frightened man moved nearer to David, who picked up the kneeling woman and gently, but decidedly, untwisted her veil and looked closely at her. The red flickering light showed him a woman of about twenty-four; it flung black shadows into the hollows of her deep-set eyes, into the cup of her firm chin, and along the curve below the delicate line of her cheek bone. The light moved, and her black eyes seemed to shine with a gleam of their own that was not a mere reflection of the torch. David had been about to speak reassuringly to her, but one glance was enough to tell him that she was

as self-possessed as himself; before he had time to frame a question she spoke:

"I am Abigail, the wife of Nabal—a fool by name and a fool by nature. I beg of you, my lord, to let me speak and to listen to my words."

"Well," said David, in an expressionless voice, his eyes fixed immovably upon her face.

"The fault is ours," she went on quickly. "Yet, my lord, pray do not consider this worthless man and his folly. *I* did not see the young men you sent up; had I done so a very different answer would have been sent; and see, my lord, when I heard what had happened, I made haste to bring some small offerings to turn away your righteous wrath."

She made a gesture with her hand, and David saw that behind her in the shadows were two other men, evidently heavily laden. He could not help smiling. In a moment Abigail was again on her knees, holding his dress and gazing up at him with flashing eyes.

"As Yahweh lives," she cried, "and as he has withheld you from shedding blood and from seeking vengeance for yourself, may your enemies and those that seek to harm you be undone by their own folly, like Nabal. And if any man pursues you and seeks your life, may it be bound in the bundle of the living

under the protection of Yahweh your God. And surely, when Yahweh has done you all the good he intends, and you are lord of us all, then you will have no grief for having shed blood or sought vengeance for yourself; and in that day remember your handmaid."

Her voice quivered and the last words were almost lost by the sudden inclination of her head; and again David felt her lips pressed on his feet. He lifted her up, and held her a little while, looking at her, before he answered. Then he stepped back a pace, and formally saluted her, pressing his hands against his lips, his forehead and his breast.

"Blessing on Yahweh, God of Israel," he said gravely, "for sending you to meet me; and blessing on your wisdom and blessing on yourself for keeping me from shedding blood. For it is true enough that, unless you had come down, by to-morrow I should not have left alive one man-child in Nabal's household."

Abigail drew a deep breath; then pointing to the servants:

"Will your young men take over the stuff?" she asked.

"Abishai!" called David, "take the food from these men, and get back to the camp, all of you.

Go in peace," he added to Abigail, "for I have granted your request."

"What 's the matter with David, that he keeps stumbling so?" whispered one of the men to another on the way back. It was lucky the way was not more precipitous than it was, for David hardly knew what he was doing. Abigail's face shone out of the darkness in front of him like an apparition; and then he would cry to himself:

"But what 's her face? It 's her judgment, her decision, her courage—her foresight . . . what a woman!" and then a moment later:

"But what 's all that? It 's her eyes, her neck, her skin—what a woman!" and that she should be the wife of such an old curmudgeon as Nabal seemed a profanity, and that he himself should have promised not to lay a finger on him an act of lunacy.

During the next few days his dreams became wild schemes to get hold of her without breaking his word; but this involved such obvious impossibilities that he was beginning to think that after all he would have to be forsworn, when Asahel brought him news that seemed a miracle from heaven.

"What do you think, David?" said the young man; "I was up in Carmel this morning and heard

such a joke. It seems that the night we were going up to settle accounts with Nabal, he and all his men were as drunk as lords and would never have known we had come till they felt our swords in their throats. Well, the next morning, when Nabal woke up, his wife told him how she 'd met us coming up to do the deed—and whether it was the fright or realizing his own folly I don't know, but anyway the old ruffian had a sort of fit and died yesterday!"

"Died!" shouted David. "Do you mean to say he 's dead?" and before the astonished Asahel had recovered he had rushed off and was deep in a secret colloquy with Abishai. His vehement impatience would not brook a moment's delay, and Abishai and half a dozen others were immediately despatched along the road to Carmel. How he endured the hours of waiting in his tent—for he could not trust himself outside it—he never knew; but at last the door was lifted and she came in.

"Ah, Abigail," he cried. "Ah, my wife!" and held out his arms.

Again she slipped to the ground and clasped his knees.

"Behold, a servant to wash the feet of your servants," she said, and David looked down at her and smiled.

Chapter VII

David was gradually becoming known to many of the chiefs living south and southeast of Judah, and with a number of them he had entered into friendly relations. He was still in dread of an attack from Saul, who from time to time sent out expeditions against him, obliging him to shift his camping ground, and he felt that the day would come when the friendship of the clans living between Judah and Edom would stand him in good stead. He was the more delighted when messengers arrived from one of the chief men of Jezreel, a town not far from Maon, offering him his daughter Ahinoam in marriage. He gladly consented, and Ahinoam was installed in the tent occupied by Abigail, who received her amiably, but resigned none of her influence.

The desirability of finding some other camping ground was becoming obvious to every one, and at last they moved northward to the wilderness of Ziph, a wide, desert region stretching northeast from the town of Ziph down as far as the Dead Sea. The disadvantage of this move was that they came more within Saul's cognizance, and sure enough it was not long before they had news that

he was coming against them. David, however, hoped that he would not be able to find their exact hiding place, and trusted to lying quiet where they were instead of trying to escape by outmarching the enemy.

One evening a scout came up to David with something for his private ear. He had gone to sleep incautiously and been caught by a man of Saul's army. This man, instead of killing him or dragging him off a prisoner, or even questioning him as to their hiding place, had given him a token to carry to David, with the words, "To-night, in the wood, by the mulberry grove."

David at once recognized the token as a bracelet belonging to Jonathan, and determined to keep the tryst. It was nearly six years since they had met; how Jonathan would be longing to see him! and how pleasant it would be to see Jonathan! As the time for the meeting approached, however, his satisfaction in the idea grew less keen. Though from many points of view he had not done so badly during the last six years—and, indeed, to any one who knew the difficulties he had had to contend with, his success might seem marvelous—yet the fact remained that he was still an outlaw and a fugitive, and that Jonathan was still the king's son. Why should he present himself before Jona-

than to enable him to gloat over the contrast in their positions? And though he knew perfectly well that in reality this was the last thing the magnanimous Jonathan could possibly do, the mere imagination caused him to feel sulky, and push out his lower lip. Nevertheless, he kept the tryst.

Jonathan had not changed in the least. He flung his arms round David and kissed him with all the old passion, and then pulled him down on the ground and asked for his story. David's sulks were not of a nature to withstand the melting power of Jonathan's affection; he smiled, put his arm in his, and began the tale of his adventures. When he had finished and answered all Jonathan's eager questions there was a pause. At last Jonathan looked down and said rather nervously:

"Michal is married, David."

David turned a dark red and clenched his fist. He hardly ever thought of her now, but this news that she belonged to another man outraged him.

"Married? To whom?"

"To Paltiel, the son of Laish—he comes from Gallim of Benjamin."

David said no more; but he fixed the name in his mind, with a furious, vague idea of revenge and destruction. Jonathan caressed him lightly, and said in his gentlest voice:

"Poor David—I do wish you had her. If only things would settle down and we two could be friends again as we used to be!"

"That 's impossible. You see yourself your father will never give up hunting me."

Jonathan sighed and made no answer, looking out with troubled eyes at the increasing light which warned them of sunrise. David rose and pulled up his coat.

"I must go back to the camp now, Jonathan. And some day Saul will catch me and that will be the end of it all."

"No, no, David," cried Jonathan, jumping up and seizing his arms. "You know *that* won't happen! My father will never catch you; but a day will come when you will be king of Israel and I shall be next to you—and then all will be well and we shall be happy again."

They looked at each other and smiled—Jonathan with the exaltation of love and devotion, David with the triumphant vision of success; then, with another long embrace, they parted.

When David got back he found Asahel looking for him in great agitation. He had been into the town of Ziph and there learnt that the townsmen had discovered the whereabouts of the camp, and either for a gift of money or a hope of future favors

had betrayed their knowledge to Saul. There was no time to be lost; the camp was struck, and their flight was directed toward Maon. But Saul was hot upon their track. Fast as David pushed on, he was encumbered by the women and children that necessarily formed part of his company, while Saul's army consisted of fighting men only. Moreover, Saul's numbers were twice as great as his own; and David soon became aware from the information of his scouts that strong bodies of men were advancing rapidly on both his flanks, and that it would not be long before he would be surrounded. He saw no way of dealing with the danger. As he walked on at the head of the column his mind worked unceasingly with the problem, but no solution presented itself. Was this, then, the end? He glanced back at the ass on which Ahinoam was sitting, with Abigail walking beside her. He ground his teeth and turned again to the situation; there must be some way out. Suddenly Joab touched his arm and pointed to the hill on the left.

"They 're going north again," he said.

David stopped and looked; then without a word he turned toward the hill on the right; there, too, the figures that had been hurrying to get in front of him were streaming away in the opposite direction. It was a rout before a battle! What had

happened? David was too stunned to comprehend the meaning of what he saw; he stood still and the whole party behind him stopped too, waiting for instructions. Presently a little body of scouts ran up, waving their arms and shouting:

"It 's all right, David, it 's all right! Saul 's marching back to Benjamin as fast as he can go, for the Philistines have made a raid in force there and are close under the walls of Gibeah!"

The cloud lifted from David's face and his blue eyes smiled like a girl's.

"Azazel be their speed!" he shouted. "Turn north again! We 'll camp in Ziph to-night!"

Chapter VIII

While Saul was occupied with the Philistines David was safe. But the respite seemed short to the harried outlaws; all too soon the news arrived that the king and his army were on their track once more. David was beginning to realize that he could not go on much longer in a state of perpetual danger. It was not so much the continuous warfare that was telling on his men's health and temper, but the fact that there were no intervals in

which they were safe from attack—the state of unrelieved alarm in which they lived was undoubtedly trying their nerves. Various different schemes suggested themselves to David, but at present he felt unable to decide on any of them.

At last he got news of Saul's close approach. It reached him at the oasis of En-gedi on the shores of the Dead Sea, and he immediately, with the greatest secrecy, moved his camp up toward Ziph. As he had hoped, Saul had heard he was at En-gedi and moved down as David moved up, so that when the two camps were pitched Saul's was below David's, and cut off by it from Benjamin. Nevertheless the numerical difference between the armies was so great that the strategical advantage in no way compensated for it, and David's men waited in great anxiety to learn what their leader intended to do.

That night David called into his tent Abishai and Ahimelech the Hittite.

"I want a companion to go with me to-night," he said. "I am going down to have a look at Saul's camp, and I want some one I can trust to go with me."

Ahimelech bit his thumb. To him the expedition looked like certain death; he wondered whether the possible advantages were worth the risk. . . .

Abishai did not hesitate. He was fond of David in an undemonstrative way, he had a lot of confidence in him, and did not bother himself much as to the consequences of his actions.

"When do you want to start?" he asked.

David smiled, pleased at his readiness.

"We'll start early," he said; "we must be there before the moon rises, and I fancy it 's a good distance off."

Things turned out as they had expected, and it was still quite dark when they found the enemy. For all his trust, Abishai was a little surprised when David, slipping past a drowsy sentinel, pushed right on into the middle of the encampment, glancing quickly right and left as he went, obviously making hasty calculations as to the size of the army. But he said nothing, and followed his uncle, going as softly as he could. Presently they reached the middle of the camp where the wagons were drawn together, and beside one of them, gleaming in the faint starlight, was stuck a spear. David seized Abishai's arm and pointed to the man who lay asleep beneath it—it was Saul himself, and at his side was Abner.

The purpose of the expedition was now clear to Abishai. He drew a deep breath and looked at David. David was standing motionless, his arms

hanging by his sides, gazing at the unconscious king. Was he, too, asleep, that he thus wasted the precious moments? Abisai took his arm, put his mouth to his ear, and whispered:

"God has delivered your enemy into your hand. Let me strike him once with the spear—I shall not need to strike twice."

As David looked he felt in memory the fragrant oil of consecration on his forehead and heard Samuel's voice saying:

"David, son of Jesse, Yahweh has anointed thee to be king over his inheritance."

Was this the way? Was this the time? He slowly stretched his hand out to grasp the spear; but suddenly another memory flashed upon him, and it was again Samuel's voice he heard:

"You are both the anointed of Yahweh . . . remember that every deed against Saul is a deed against yourself. . . ."

And as he gazed at the sleeping man it seemed to him that it was indeed himself who lay there, helpless, at the mercy of midnight assassins—rebellious conspirators. He shuddered, and his arm dropped to his side. Then turning to the astounded Abishai, he whispered in his ear:

"Do not destroy him; for who can touch the anointed of Yahweh and be guiltless?"

"What then?" whispered Abishai; for it was plainly not the time for arguing; and David answered:

"Take the spear at his head and I will take the water bottle from his side and we will go."

On the way into the camp David had noticed a steep slope leading more directly but more precipitously toward Ziph; it was up this slope that he and Abishai scrambled, and after a few minutes of panting effort they were beyond reach of Saul and his men. Once safe, David turned to Abishai and laughed.

"Now we 'll have some fun," he said, for the violent physical exertion and the sense of having escaped from incredible danger almost miraculously, had brought one of his sudden reactions, and he felt nothing but amused triumph and exhilaration in the adventure.

"Abner!" he shouted with all the force of his lungs. "Abner! don't you hear?"

"What 's that?" cried Abner, startled out of his sound sleep, and amazed to hear some one yelling to him in the darkness.

" 'What 's that?' " echoed David, with a laugh. "What do you think it is? O valiant Abner, who is your equal in all Israel? Who keeps better watch over the king than you? Did not some one

creep in just now to kill him, while you slept? Look and see where his spear is and the water bottle he keeps at his side!"

There was a pause. David imagined, though he could not see it, Abner's angry, perplexed search for the missing spear and water bottle and laughed inwardly at the thought. Then some one spoke in tones that were not Abner's—tones that were melancholy and hesitating:

"Is this your voice, my son David?"

In a moment David's sense of amusement vanished.

"It is my voice, my lord the king," he answered; and was silent. Saul too was silent, and David felt that curious emotional contagion that he had so often experienced in Saul's presence.

"Well," he thought, "I 'll make one more try—though I know it's hopeless . . ." and spoke again:

"What have I done to make you seek my life, my lord? Am I not your servant? What has turned you against me? If it is Yahweh who makes you my enemy, let him accept a sweet-smelling sacrifice and be appeased. But if it is the slander of men, let them be accursed for driving me out of the land of Yahweh to live in strange lands and worship strange gods. . . ."

He stopped, and presently the voice of Saul

answered, drifting faintly and sadly through the space between them:

"I have sinned; return, my son David; I will do you no more harm, because my life was precious in your eyes to-day; I have played the fool; I have done very wrong."

David sighed. The pathetic words made his nerves vibrate, but in its deepest core his heart was unstirred.

"Well," he said, "here is the spear, my lord king. Send one of the young men over for it. And as your life was precious in my eyes to-day so may my life be precious in the eyes of Yahweh, and may he deliver me out of all my tribulation."

And the voice of Saul floated back:

"Bless you, my son David; you shall do mighty deeds; surely you shall conquer."

Silence. David and Abishai turned round and climbed back to their own camp.

PART III

WITH THE PHILISTINES

Chapter I

INSTEAD of being reassured by his conversation with Saul, David was more and more convinced that the king was implacable toward him. He was confirmed in this view by finding that in spite of his declaration that he would do David no harm he remained encamped with his army, watching, and evidently ready to pounce. When this was once clear, David at last made up his mind what to do. He turned again in his thought to Samuel's advice, and remembered how the old Prophet had warned him that he would not always find a refuge in the Judean wilderness, and had counseled him, when the time came, to throw himself on the protection of Achish, the lord of Gath. He smiled as he recalled his horror at the idea, and his certainty that the Philistines could not forgive his exploits against them. The David of that day seemed indeed a cal-

low, inexperienced youth, and the six years that separated them an impassable gulf.

Certainly he had now no doubts or hesitations. He did not even think it necessary to consult Yahweh, for he did not believe his men would raise any difficulties. He chose Gad as his envoy, and after a long talk, in which he coached him with minuteness in the matter and almost in the words of his message, sent him off with a small but picked bodyguard to Gath. Then came one of those periods of waiting that were so trying to a man of David's natural activity—a time of imagining every possible disaster, ranging from a simple negative from Achish, to the slaughter of Gad and his companions by the enraged Philistines. At last, however, in reality not a day after they were due, the embassy returned, and it was at once apparent, even through the weariness of travel, that they had been successful. Achish had been most agreeable, had fallen in—almost eagerly—with all Gad's suggestions, and had ended by extending an invitation to David and his followers to come at once to Gath.

And so for the last time in the wilderness of Judea the six hundred struck camp. David was fully conscious that he was entering a totally new experience, and as usual his spirits rose with the idea of adventure. While Joab and Ahimelech

were grumbling to each other at the thought of "putting their heads into the lion's mouth," and Abishai was stolidly seeing to the details of preparing a start, David—getting through as much work as all three put together—was amusing himself with Asahel and one or two other of the younger men, keeping them in fits of laughter, and spreading his irresistible gaiety through the whole camp at a moment which might have filled them with regret and anxiety.

The actual journey into Philistia was made without hindrance, and at last David found himself in the outskirts of Gath. He paused to gather all the stragglers in, set himself at the head of the troop, and prepared to make as imposing an entry as he could into the enemy's town. For himself, his surprise and awe at what met his eyes went beyond anything he had anticipated, for with his journey to Moab and his rovings over Israel and Judah he considered himself a traveled man. It was clear, however, after a first glance at Gath, that he was face to face with a totally different civilization, of a splendor and extent he had never dreamt of.

It was a walled city with watchtowers set at intervals in the walls—but this was a form of fortification with which David was familiar. What surprised him was, first, the apparent size of the

town, and second, the fact that here and there within the enclosure were buildings high enough to be seen above the city wall. What could they be? From outside it was impossible to tell—they must be seen nearer at hand.

Once inside the town, there was another surprise. No one seemed to take any interest in them, or indeed to pay them any particular attention. David was accustomed to the immense curiosity of the Palestine villages in which the appearance of one stranger draws forth the whole population to stare and exclaim. Here, six hundred men and their families passed through the streets almost unnoticed. It is true the streets were immensely wide, and packed full of traffic—hundreds of men and women, asses, camels, oxen, astonishing wagons, variegated costumes, plumed headdresses, embroidered robes, yellow faces, and shaved heads formed a bewildering kaleidoscope, as he tried to push his way along. And then the buildings! Could there be so many temples? For right and left were the tall edifices he had seen from outside, magnificent constructions with wooden pillars in front and high domed roofs, so splendid that surely only the gods could inhabit them. But were there so many gods?

However, it was now time to find Achish, and David realized, with fresh astonishment, that he

would not be able to find his dwelling place without inquiry. After looking round he stopped a man dressed in a way with which he was familiar; he was naked except for a broad waistband and wore one of the plumed headdresses, fitted into an embroidered band encircling his temples, and fastened on his head by a chin strap which passed in front of his ears. This was the costume of a soldier; and by the silver bands on his arm David judged that he was of sufficient rank to be able to answer a question sensibly.

"Greeting, friend," he said. "Can you take me to the house of Achish?"

"Achish?" answered the man with a laugh. "What Achish do you want? Achish the potter? Achish the smith? Achish the corn merchant? Achish the son of Phicol? Achish the son of Badyra? Achish. . . ."

"Stop, stop!" exclaimed David, laughing in his turn. "It is none of these. The Achish I want is the king of Gath."

"The king of Gath? Oh, you mean the seren. I suppose you are a Hebrew. Yes, I can take you to him—only take care he does n't make you into a stew for his supper!"

Still laughing, the man took the lead, and in a little while stopped in front of the biggest of the

domed temples David had seen. Outside of it a lot of soldiers were lounging, and his guide went up to one of them and spoke to him in a low voice. Immediately he hurried forward and saluted David.

"Greeting," he said. "Are not you David, the son of Jesse?" And on David's acquiescing he saluted him again.

"The seren is expecting you," he said. "Will you tell your men to wait here a little while, and come in and speak to him yourself?"

Chapter II

Achish was delighted by the fate which sent him David as a client. In the first place it definitely deprived the Israelites of far the most brilliant general they had ever had; then it put that general at the service of the Philistines; and finally it provided an opportunity for making permanent one of the internecine quarrels which had always been the bane of the Israelites, and the opportunity of the Philistines. When Achish considered the situation he was staggered at the incredible folly of Saul in driving such a supporter into the service of the enemy; when he met David himself and got to

know him, he could not comprehend the king of Israel's bad taste in parting with such a delightful companion.

Everything was done to attach David to the country he had chosen. His followers were housed in a special quarter of the city, and he himself was given apartments in the seren's palace. He was afforded full opportunities for seeing all the riches and power of Philistia; and if this was done with any ulterior reason it was still a favor which David most thoroughly appreciated. He visited each of the five Philistine cities, and as he went from one to another, realized fully the richness and fertility of the country that lay, as it were, within hand's reach of Israel. On the great road between Gaza and Ashdod, which was also the great road between Egypt and Assyria, he saw caravans that opened his eyes for the first time to the true meaning of commerce. At Ashkelon he saw the sea and ships—not that Dead Sea of the plain, as dead as the desert in whose lap it lay—but the Mediterranean—the "Great Sea" in the midst of the earth, the most wonderful highway that could be imagined between nations at opposite ends of the world.

Yet, in spite of the friendship of Achish, the relief from anxiety, and the delight of widening horizons, David was not comfortable in Gath. The

strange food at the king's table—meat often cooked in the animal's blood, or unknown flesh whose name he dared not ask—sometimes gave him a physical nausea, besides shocking him profoundly in his religious convictions. The worship of Dagon and the wonderful fish-tailed woman to whom the great flock of doves was kept sacred was an outrage to him, and worse than all he feared daily more and more that the moment would come when Achish would call upon him to take the field against Saul. This he was determined to avoid; but to do so without causing a breach with the seren he must forestall the order with a scheme of his own.

He had been in Gath many months when at last he found an opportunity to bring forward his suggestion.

"Well, David," said Achish one day, "and how do you like living in Philistia? Do you find your old enemies make good friends?"

"Certainly *you* are a good friend to me, my lord," answered David, "and to live in Philistia after wandering in the desert is like living with the gods. Indeed, I don't know why you are so good as to keep me with you in the royal city—I have been thinking for some time it would be more suitable for me to go to one of the provincial towns where I could be of more use to you."

"Of more use to me? How do you mean?"

"It has been in my mind that if I were in one of the towns on the southern border of the country I could keep an eye on any of the desert tribes who might be inclined to be disorderly. And it would be a good position, would n't it, for attacking the Southern tribes of the Hebrews—Judah, Jerahmeel Simeon? . . ."

Achish brightened up; here was David volunteering to do what he himself had been too tactful to suggest all this time—it was an opportunity of embroiling him further with the rest of Israel which was obviously to be snatched at.

"The very thing—though I shall miss you sadly, David. But how would this arrangement do? You shall have the town of Ziklag for your own, and the cultivated lands that belong to it; and in return you shall give me half the booty you take on any raid. How would that suit you? Oh, and I shall make one other stipulation—you must come yourself with the plunder, so that I may still see you from time to time."

Of course David agreed to the flattering arrangement, and it was not long before the little band was established at Ziklag. But David's real intentions in settling thus far to the south and at such a distance from Gath were not altogether what he had

led Achish to suppose. He certainly never for a moment meant to invade his own country, and the booty with which he was to provide a tribute must come from other sources. Luckily for him, there was no lack of desert tribes against whom he could make forays; the only question was how to prevent the news reaching Achish that it was not against his own race that the expeditions were being made. A solution soon presented itself. His own men would keep this secret readily enough, for their safety depended upon it; if none of the enemy were left alive, there would be no one else who *could* betray it. This accordingly became David's method of warfare. Whenever he descended on a village or a nomad encampment he put the whole of the enemy—men and women—to the sword, and carried off the live stock and anything of value they possessed. It was a disagreable necessity—he saw no alternative. He was exact and regular in his accounts with Achish and only misled him as regards the original owners of the spoil.

"David is certainly safe now," thought Achish. "The Israelites must by this time hold him in abhorrence—he has quite cut himself off from them and has no choice but to remain in our service forever."

Chapter III

Meanwhile David's dreams were keeping pace with his growing knowledge of the world and familiarity with the possibilities of power and civilization. His fantasies started now with the assumption that he would be king of Israel—this seemed so certain that the idea had lost much of its interest to him—but then? . . . What then? . . . He laughed to himself at Saul's idea of kingship—"as well be a farmer like Nabal," he thought. "Why, he could n't even lay his hands on me, or kill me when he had me in his house. Things sha'n't be like that when *I'm* king. I'd like to see any of them disobeying me—Abner! or Joab!" (But Joab was a rather uncomfortable idea and he turned away from it.) He would have absolute order and unity in his own kingdom—but that was n't enough. To have peace he must prevent the constant Philistine raids that ruined the land; to have prosperity he must possess the rich Philistine lands with their splendid crops of corn and grape. But would such a thing be possible? The Israelites to conquer—not merely to defeat in battle—but to *conquer* the Philistines? "Well," he thought, "if any

one can do it I can, for I know them as enemies and I know them as friends—I know their strength and their weakness . . . they 're heavy—all those chariots—they can't move quickly—they can't change a plan when it 's once made—something on those lines . . ." his thoughts grew vague, and then took a leap: "And when the Philistines are subdued I 'll reduce the South and the North and the East—and my empire shall be bounded by the desert and the 'Great Sea'!" His heart beat violently and his breath came quickly. Then he gave a laugh, for here he was, a servant of Achish of Gath, with an army of six hundred, and Ziglag for an empire! Well! he could wait.

One day David was summoned urgently to Gath. When he got there he found that the situation he had been afraid of had arisen. The Philistines were planning a great descent on Saul, and Achish had need of David and his men.

"How many can you bring up, David? About six hundred, is n't it?"

"Yes, it 'll be about that," answered David, cautiously, and searching round in his mind if there were any way of escape.

"Now, David," continued Achish, eagerly, pulling him down to a seat beside him, "I 'll tell you what I 'm going to do . . . you know how I hate

having you so far away in Ziklag—three days off —at the ends of the earth—well, I 've thought of a way to keep you here beside me forever. . . . I shall make you the captain of my bodyguard!"

David exclaimed upon his own unworthiness and the seren's overwhelming kindness, and inwardly sighed with relief when pressure of business obliged Achish to dismiss him. During the days of waiting for the arrival of his own troop from Ziklag and the assembly of the rest of the Gath contingent he occupied himself in desperate attempts to discover some issue to the dilemma in which he found himself. One obvious idea was to wait until the battle began and then turn upon the Philistines—he remembered Jonathan telling him that at the battle of Michmash, that great victory for the Israelites, there had been a body of Hebrews in the Philistine army who had played exactly that trick. But after long consideration he rejected this plan. In the first place, he felt sure that the Israelite army was now hopelessly incapable, and he did not believe that even with his help Saul would be able to obtain a victory. And defeat in those circumstances meant complete ruin. In the second place, even if by some miracle—the intervention of Yahweh, or some lucky coup of his own—the Israelites *were* victorious, he did not see that he should be much better off. He

would have to leave Philistia, and the old story of Saul's distrust or a life of exile would begin over again. No, he must find some other scheme. . . .

The meeting place for the Philistine army was at Aphek, three days off in the plain of Sharon. At Lod, where the Gittites joined the main road, they came across the other bodies of Philistines, from Gaza, Ekron, Ashkelon, and Ashdod, all advancing to the rendezvous. These men were not inclined to be as friendly with David's party as their old acquaintances of Gath, and he was obliged to keep a careful watch and give strict orders to prevent disputes, and perhaps more, on the line of march. Indeed, just as they were coming to the plain of Sharon he caught one of his own men and a Philistine from Ekron hacking at each other with their swords. He immediately handed over the Israelite to Joab, with orders to punish him severely, and seizing the unfortunate Philistine dragged him off and informed him that at the end of the day's march he would be dealt with.

He was as good as his word. That evening, when the camp had been pitched and the evening meal was over, he sent for his captive and led him, protesting and almost in tears, to the tent of the seren of Ekron.

The seren, who was sitting alone with a scribe,

was an elderly man, very dignified and stern. He looked at David with ill-disguised displeasure, and did not seem much impressed by his story of the quarrel between the two soldiers. He spoke a few sharp words to the Ekronite and sent him off. Then turning to David, he said, almost as sharply:

"How do you come to be here, Hebrew?"

"I am in the service of Achish of Gath, my lord," answered David with a low obeisance.

The seren grunted, and was about to dismiss him, when David suddenly jerked his sword out from behind his coat and then, with some deliberation, began to put it back in its place.

The two Philistines, whose eyes had naturally been caught by the weapon, started, and the scribe bent forward and whispered in his master's ear.

"Let me look at your sword, Hebrew," said the seren. "Yes," he continued after looking at it carefully, "this was the sword of Goliath of Gath —was it not?"

"Yes, my lord," answered David.

The seren bit his lip and stared at him; the scribe lent forward and asked in a silky voice:

"Then are not you the celebrated David, the son of Jesse?"

"I *am* David, the son of Jesse, certainly," and

David's voice hinted that it was not for him to claim celebrity.

"Have you been long in the service of Achish?" asked the seren, abruptly.

"Only two years, my lord. But I am not an altogether untried soldier, nevertheless, since before becoming the servant of Achish I fought for some time with the Hebrews."

"So I understand," said the seren, bitterly.

"Though I am still far from the knowledge of war that would make me worthy to fight in the ranks of such famous warriors as the Philistines. Doubtless with *them,* officers must have served *many* years before reaching high command . . . my lord will perhaps have been in the battle of Michmash?"

The seren started violently, and the veins stood out on his forehead. The scribe bent hurriedly over his writings to conceal the malignant smile he could not keep out of his face. Really, the tact of these Hebrews! Fancy mentioning the battle of Michmash to a Philistine! And it happened to be particularly rich, for the seren *had* been in it, and had not come out of it with more credit than any one else . . . in fact, there was a story. . . .

"Go!" said the seren, fiercely; and David made his obeisance and withdrew in silence.

Next day was held the council of the Philistine

leaders. Immediately it was over David was sent for to the tent of Achish, whose disordered countenance at once displayed his grief.

"It is no use, David—I did my very best, but it is not to be. They insist that you are to be sent back."

"What has happened, my lord?"

"Such an outcry in the council!" answered Achish. " 'What are these Hebrews doing here?' they said. 'Well,' said I, 'you all know how David quarreled with Saul years ago, and since he has been with me he has been faultless in every way.' But it was no use; there was that old ass Maoch of Ekron who kept on about Michmash—as if *you* would ever betray us—and then brought up that old nonsense, 'Saul has slain his thousands and David his ten thousands'—and then his impudent scribe put in his word—how you would reconcile yourself to Saul with a present of all of our heads—and all the others chimed in—and the long and the short of it is that you must go back at once."

"But, my lord," cried David, "what have I done? Have I ever been unfaithful, that I should not be allowed to fight against your enemies?"

"David," said Achish, seriously and sadly, "all the time you have been with me you have been like

an angel of God. But the council has decided against you and I can do no more."

There was a pause; Achish continued:

"You must go back to Ziklag. You must not make any delay, but start in the morning as soon as it is light. And David . . . do not be angry with me . . . do not design any evil against me . . . for *I* know you are blameless . . . and David —I love you."

Chapter IV

David's soldiers were amazed at the pace at which he began the march back to Ziklag. He went nearly twenty-five miles on the first day, and another fifteen the following day brought them to Gath, twenty miles from home. The fact was David was so delighted with the success of his manœuvers that he felt like dancing back to Ziklag himself, and was impatient of the smallest delay from his companions. As usual, his spirits soon infected his men, and they pushed on, wondering what it was all about, but cheerfully and almost gaily.

On arriving at Gath, however, they felt no inclination to slacken, but rather to hurry on. The

Gittites met them with long faces and vague tales of disaster at Ziklag. No one seemed to know exactly what it was, and David would not wait to sift their stories, but urged on his troop that they might find out the truth for themselves as soon as possible.

They made such good speed that they came in sight of Ziklag before sunset on the third day. Asahel had run on ahead as they approached the place where it came into view; he gave one glance and then rushed back to David, his face white, his lips shaking.

"It 's . . . it 's . . ." he stammered, but could bring nothing more out. David ground his teeth and went on; when he came to the rise of the road he stopped, his worst fears realized—the town was not to be seen. Instead of the walled enclosure of houses he had left behind there was a small heap of ruins from which rose languid spirals of smoke —black against the hot blue sky. The sweat broke out on his forehead, and without glancing round or uttering a word he began to run toward the remains of his home. What should he find when he got there?

The place appeared quite deserted; not a creature, living or dead, was to be seen—nothing but charred fragments, remains of what had been dwelling

places. David's men came close on his heels, and in a moment the desolation was increased by the wild sobs and cries of the fathers and husbands searching vainly amidst the devastation for some trace of their dearest possessions.

"Joash—Joash, my darling, where are you? . . . My Miriam . . . answer me. . . . Not one here—not one . . . nothing . . . nothing . . . nothing. . . ."

What agony could be like this? David stood in the midst of the ruins, the tears rushing down his cheeks, wild, fiery sobs tearing his lungs and throat. . . . All was gone . . . all. . . .

Gradually he became aware of the people around him, and aware, too, that their emotion was changing its character. The abandonment of despair was over and was succeeded by an animal rage and desire for revenge. But against whom could they wreak it? The enemy had chosen their time well—they had done their work and vanished, and were now out of reach and safe. But should *no one* suffer for this outrage?

Then some one mentioned the name of David—was not he responsible for it all? He who had led them out to battle so often? Who had burnt so many towns? Seized so much plunder? Exterminated so many clans? Was not this clearly a

revenge from some tribe he had attacked? Who was to blame if not David? The murmurs grew more and more menacing; each man incited his neighbor, and suddenly a stone, picked up from a fallen wall, flew through the air and cut his cheek. Instantly he awoke from the stupor into which his despair had thrown him, and before the infection of stone-throwing had time to spread he jumped up on a little mound and began to shout to the furious soldiers.

"You do well to be angry . . . the cowards dare not meet us face to face, but when our backs are turned. . . ."

There was a roar of approval, and then silence, to see what else he had to say.

"But don't waste your anger in throwing stones at me. You 'll want every ounce of strength to pursue these devils. . . ."

"But who are they? . . . Pursue which way? . . . What 's the good of pursuit? . . ."

"What 's the good of pursuit? Ah, I thought it would be Abiezar who would ask that! Because, Abiezar, as you can see, they 've not killed a single person—they 've carried every living creature away with them, and if we catch them in time. . . ."

Another shout of agreement, but still one objector who called out again:

"But who are *they?*"

"How do I know? But with a little common sense we might find out. Has anybody found anything they left behind in their hurry?"

There was some calling out and pushing, and a young man handed up an embroidered belt. David glanced at it and held it out to the crowd.

"You can all see that this is an Amalekite belt. Now, it's a thousand to one they've gone off southwest toward Egypt, and if we hurry we shall reach them in time."

There were still some dissentients, and a discussion as to the wisdom of this idea at once broke out. But David's mind was made up. Abigail and Ahinoam and his unborn child were among the missing; besides, if he lost grip of his men now he was lost. He *must* have his own way, and he must convince them it was the right way; it was largely a question of time, and time depended on the good will of his followers.

"Abiathar," he called loudly, "bring me the ephod and prepare to inquire of Yahweh for me . . . Am I to pursue these men? . . . Shall I overtake them? . . . Shall I recover what is lost?"

And Yahweh answered through the sacred lot:

"Pursue: for thou shalt overtake them, and shalt without fail recover all."

Chapter V

David did not waste a single moment. He called out the chief officers by name and ordered them sharply to get the men together; then, though the sun was setting and they had already had three day's hard marching, he set out again. At first the anxiety and rage in the men's hearts carried them forward, but it was not long before their exhaustion compelled a halt. David gave them an hour and pushed them on again; by sunrise they had reached a brook known as the Besor, and here they made another halt. David inquired from his officers in what condition the men were, and it was discovered that about two hundred of them were quite incapable of going farther. It was agreed that they should be left behind, and with them every scrap of baggage, so as to lighten the difficulties of the four hundred who went on.

And so they started again on that terrible pursuit. Their limbs were aching, their eyes heavy with want of sleep, and as the sun increased in brilliance and heat a violent thirst began to assail most of them. But David at least was unconscious of all this. The sweat ran down into his eyes and he rubbed it away mechanically—his thoughts were fixed on the

end of the journey. Would there be any end? He pictured them going on—on—on, forever through the heat, seeing no one, meeting no one, knowing no more than they knew now. How long would the men behind him follow? How long would he be able to lead? . . . Or—another horrible supposition—they would begin to come to the bodies of those captives who could not keep up with the rest—or who had displeased their masters—Abigail the devoted and beautiful, or—good God!—Ahinoam and her burden. . . . He bit his lip, and did not notice the blood trickle down.

Suddenly his heart almost stopped beating—there was a human figure lying across the road—was it the imagined ghastly beginning of the trail?

"Asahel," he whispered with dry lips, and pointed to the body. Asahel went forward and presently returned.

"It is a man—a slave," he said, and David breathed again; "I think he 's alive."

David went up to him and looked at him closely. Then he turned round.

"Two of you carry him into the shade of that rock. The others have an hour's rest. Gad, we 've *got* to bring this man to life."

It was a long business. They forced water between his lips, they rubbed his hands, his legs, his chest,

they sprinkled water on his face. Then when life began to show signs of returning, they squeezed grape juice into his mouth, and at last when he appeared conscious but still too weak to move or speak, they fed him with small pieces of bread and dried fruit. David watched him narrowly all the time, and at last judged he was strong enough to answer questions, though he made Gad stand by, ready with nourishment and water if they were required.

"To whom do you belong?" David began.

"To an Amalekite." David's eyes sparkled. Surely they were on the right track!

"Where do you come from?"

"I am an Egyptian—" then, seeing that was not what the questioner meant—"we had been making raids upon the southern Philistines, and Judah, and the south of Caleb; and we burnt Ziklag."

"How did you come here?"

"Three days ago I fell ill and my master left me because I could not keep up with the rest."

"Listen, Egyptian." David knelt down in front of him and looked at him fixedly. "Will you show me the way to these Amalekites?"

The young man hesitated. At last he said:

"They left me to die and you brought me back

to life. Swear to me by your god that you will not kill me and I will take you to them."

"I swear by the life of Yahweh that I will not touch a hair of your head," answered David, promptly.

"Yes," said the Egyptian, nervously, "but swear, too, that you will not give me up to my master. . . ."

"Your master!" David laughed and stood up. "You need n't be afraid of that; we come from Ziklag!"

Everything now depended on speed, and David laid the case before Joab, consulting him as to whether it would be better policy to rest longer or to start at once. After a little discussion they agreed, partly for the sake of the Egyptian, to wait another half hour before starting. When the half-hour was up David assembled the men and told them they had found a guide and that if they could get on fast enough they would probably catch the abductors. He then selected a dozen of the strongest men who were to go in advance, carrying the Egyptian; Asahel was attached to this party, with orders to run back to David directly the Amalekites were sighted.

The four hundred set out again; but now that the sun was creeping down the sky and hope was in their hearts, everything seemed changed. David's

buoyant spirits were rising again—now he felt sure that Yahweh had been right and they would recover all.

"It 's like this," he said to himself: "if we find everything and everybody untouched—absolutely everything—then I shall know for certain that I 'm to be king of Israel . . . and all that; but if *one* thing is missing, nothing will come off—I shall be Achish's servant all my life. But it 'll be all right, I know . . . only *everything* must be there. . . ."

Twilight was beginning when the welcome sight of Asahel running back to them greeted David.

"Nothing could be better," he gasped; "They're encamped, but they 've no sentinels. They 're sitting round the camp eating and drinking and making a fearful din—at least half of them must be drunk. The women and children and plunder are in the middle of the camp, quite out of the way."

David smiled and flung off his coat; he wanted to have his arms free. He spoke a word to Joab and the men began spreading out in a wide circle so as to prevent their prey from escaping. It was hardly worth while. The Amalekites were as helpless as sheep under their blows, and the great bulk of them were slaughtered like sheep. A few hundred in the confusion of the massacre found camels

and fled away, but the killing went steadily on till long after the sun had set. When the last Amalekite had breathed his last, the Israelites turned to the enclosure in the middle of the camp where the women and children were huddled, in the midst of the live stock and heaps of plunder. All were there and all were safe. Ahinoam was sure that all was well, for Abigail had taken such care of her. David could hardly believe it—were they *really* all there?

"Well," said Joab, "the men say no one is missing—I must say we 've had luck, David; and look at that pile of plunder—it 'll build ten Ziklags the size of the one they burnt, and stock them with everything they want. But, thank goodness, here 's something to eat—after that I shall sleep sound to-night."

The return to the brook Besor the next day was a joyful procession. The two hundred met them with shouts of triumph and amazement at the sight of the booty. After a while, however, a hubbub arose amongst them, not quite so joyous, and David inquired what was going on.

Abiezar stepped forward and made his obeisance.

"We of the four hundred," he answered, "are willing to give back to the two hundred their wives

and children; but we will not give them any of the spoil, for it was we who recovered it and they were not there at all."

David laughed; then he took a spear in his hand and sitting down called the disputants before him.

"Listen to my judgment, my brothers," he said: "The men that fight in the battle could not fight freely if there were not men left behind to guard the baggage and the camp. Both are of equal importance in the army; therefore let both share alike in the division of the spoil."

He could not help smiling when he heard the shout with which the judgment was received as *a statute and an ordinance for Israel forever,* and remembered the other shouts the same men had given only two days ago when they were for stoning him. . . . But his thoughts did not linger over that. He was thinking of his own share of the spoil—it would obviously be colossal, and he ought to do something worth while with it.

"I have many to whom I am indebted," he thought, "and there are many who can be won over with gifts . . . some in the south of Judah have suspected me since I have served the Philistines . . . now is my chance to settle with all these men. Well, I believe after all, the Amalekites burnt Ziklag in a happy hour for me!"

Chapter VI

When they got back to the ruined Ziklag the first obvious necessity was to restore the place to a habitable condition. But while this essential work was proceeding David set aside a group of men to whom he confided the spoil he was going to give away, together with suitable messages to those who were to receive it. These men he sent off at once, from his usual desire for action which always made it painful to him to delay executing what he had determined on; and this time something whispered to him that it had better be done immediately. Who knew what would be the result of the battle between Saul and the Philistines?

The day after their return David was called off from superintending the rebuilding by the arrival of Elihu. Since the death of Samuel, Elihu, while remaining in Saul's service, had apparently come to look upon David as one who stood in Samuel's place, and would often go over to him, more or less secretly, to tell him any news that seemed important or interesting. David always saw him and saw him alone, and encouraged his queer discoursive tales from which it was sometimes so difficult to extract the kernel.

"Well, David," said Elihu at once, "here is a pretty state of affairs; and what news we may expect in the next day or two I tremble to think of."

"You trembling, Elihu! And why are you here instead of being with Saul at the camp? Or perhaps the battle is over, and you have come to bring me news of it."

"No," answered Elihu, shutting his mouth with a snap, but opening it again at once. "I can't bring you news of the battle, exactly, for I 've not been at it; though in another sense that 's just what I *have* brought you. And as for being in Saul's camp, I 've had enough of Saul and his camp too, and you won't find me near either of them again in a hurry."

"What! giving up Saul's service after all these years!" cried David. "Why, what would Samuel say if he knew of it?"

"'*What would Samuel say*'! Ah! '*What would Samuel say*'! And suppose I were to tell you that it 's just what Samuel says that 's making me do it?"

"What Samuel says? I suppose you mean some advice he gave you years ago, as to what to do in certain circumstances?"

"I mean nothing of the kind—no 'advice' or 'certain circumstances' or 'years ago' in it. I mean

what I heard Samuel say to Saul no longer—or, rather, no *shorter* ago than two days!"

David stared at Elihu, completely bewildered.

"Well, I don't understand a word you 're saying," he said, at last. "You 'll have to tell me the whole tale."

"Yes!" said Elihu, triumphantly; "so I shall; and *then* you won't understand a word, either! But listen, and do your best. You know how troublesome Saul's devil has been getting of late—sometimes it has n't left him alone for days, and really it 's been most unpleasant going near him at those times. I believe he used to plague you, in the old days, David, so you 'll know what it 's like—but it 's got fifty times worse, I assure you. Well, when he heard the Philistines were out again, he got into one of his regular states, and presently began calling for the priest to cast the sacred lot and inquire of Yahweh for him. You can imagine how awkward we all felt, but none of us liked to remind him of what had happened to the priests, and he was getting quite furious, when Jonathan went and whispered something in his ear. I don't know what it was, but it seemed to calm him a bit. Then suddenly he shouted out: 'Then send Samuel to me!' Now, David, that was an uncanny thing to say, was n't it? And you should have heard

his voice! I assure you it made me creep. . . . However, presently he seemed to remember and said more quietly, 'Oh, he 's dead too, is n't he? No prophets either, then.' He got a little calmer after that, and Jonathan and Abner got the tribesmen together and we all set off north—for we 'd heard the Philistines were at Shunem. I quite thought you 'd be there with them, David; in fact, I don't know why you 're not. . . ."

"Never mind about that now," said David, swallowing his impatience at the interruption; "go on with your story—it 's most interesting."

"It is, is n't it?" said the delighted Elihu, "but you wait till you hear the end. . . . Well, we camped at Gilboa, and that very evening Saul sent for me. I saw at once his devil was on him—his cheeks were red, and his eyes shining and open twice as wide as usual, and he was trembling all over. 'Listen, Elihu,' says he; 'I have inquired of Yahweh, but he won't answer. I 've tried dreams, and prophets, and Urim and Thummim, but it 's just as if there were no Yahweh at all—I get no answer—none, none, none.' 'Think of that!' said I, to soothe him; but he went on: 'Yes, that 's all very well, Elihu, but here are the Philistines, and how am I to know whether to attack them or not, and whether we shall be successful, if Yahweh

won't answer?' Well, I thought, whatever Yahweh says or does n't say, it 's certain that if you don't attack the Philistines they 'll attack you, and so as to the success of the affair we 've only to wait till the end of the battle to find that out . . . but, of course, I did n't say so to Saul. But then I discovered why he had sent for me; he pulled my sleeve and looked horribly cunning and whispered in my ear—as if he were afraid of hearing himself what he was going to say: 'Elihu, you must find me a *witch,* and I 'll go and inquire from her!' Now I 'm not one of those who 's easily surprised, but I must say that did surprise me, for you know how Saul put to death everybody that he could lay hands on who told fortunes. However, it so happened that I knew of just the woman he wanted, and not so far off, either—it's at Endor that she lives—and I told him of her and he was wild to go. The long and the short of it is that the same night Saul and Joshua—that 's one of his servants—and I set out for Endor, and I assure you my heart was in my mouth, for we had to go round the Philistine camp at Shunem to get there and I made quite sure they 'd catch us—but they did n't. Well, we got to the old woman's place all right and she let us in. Saul was all wrapped up so that his face was hidden, and he 'd told us not to speak. 'Woman,' says he,

'I hear you have a familiar spirit; make him call up the person I shall name, that I may question him.' At first she made a fearful fuss—the king had forbidden it, and she dare n't, and she could n't, and so forth. But Saul quieted her and coaxed her, and at last she asked who was to be brought up. 'The Prophet Samuel,' said he; and at that the woman gave a scream and fell on her knees. 'Why did you deceive me?' she shrieked. 'I know you 're Saul. . . .' Well, he swore by Yahweh he would do her no harm, and at last she agreed to go on. Now, David, by this time, what with the darkness, and Saul's devil, and the witch's familiar spirit, and all the screaming and swearing that had been going on, I was beginning to feel very uncomfortable, and I know Joshua was too. But there was worse to follow. The old woman began to rock to and fro and make the most extraordinary moans and groans you ever heard; then suddenly she called out: 'I see a god coming up out of the earth!' I could n't see anything, and it was awful to know spirits were there you could n't see. 'What is he like?' asked Saul, and the witch answered: 'He is an old man and he is covered with a robe.' 'Samuel!' exclaimed Saul, throwing himself on the ground; and, of course, Samuel *was* an old man, and most often wore a robe. Joshua and I did

obeisance too, though I don't suppose he noticed us. Then—and that was the most alarming thing of all —Samuel spoke, and I recognized his voice at once. 'Why do you disturb me, and bring me back to earth?' he said, and I would not have been Saul for something. 'I am in great distress,' he answered, and I thought his voice was trembling. 'The Philistines are making war on me and Yahweh has left me and will not answer me either by prophets or by dreams; so I have called you up that you may tell me what to do.' Then Samuel's voice came again, and this time it was angrier than before: 'And why, then, do you consult *me,* if Yahweh has left you and become your enemy? By to-morrow you and your sons with you will have fallen and Yahweh will deliver the army of Israel into the hands of the Philistines.' At that Saul fell on his face on the floor, and I suppose Samuel went down into the earth again, for the old woman kindled a light and came to Saul to see what she could do for him. At first Saul would n't hear of anything and lay on the floor groaning, but at last we persuaded him to get up and sit on the old woman's bed while she prepared some food for us—and I must say she had a delicious fatted calf and some excellent unleavened bread—I 'm sure we all needed it after those dreadful doings. But we could n't stay very

long, for we had to get past the Philistine's camp again. We managed it all right, and when we 'd once got Saul safe in his tent I made off. I don't like such doings—and if Samuel 's right and Yahweh is going to deliver the army of Israel into the hands of the Philistines, I for one don't mean to be in it. . . ."

Chapter VII

David pondered for a long time on Elihu's extraordinary story. He came to the conclusion that Saul was a braver man than he had thought, though he had certainly never taken him for a coward. But to call Samuel up from the dead! He shook his head and felt it was beyond him. As regards Samuel's prophecy, he thought it extremely likely to be fulfilled, for the Philistines had come out in great force and Saul had evidently gone completely to pieces—he was clearly quite incapable of commanding the Israelite army with any sort of efficiency. He waited impatiently for news of the battle; he had not long to wait.

On the third day after the return to Ziklag, the day after Elihu's visit, David saw a man rushing

toward them from the north. As he came nearer it could be seen that his clothes were torn, and his head and body covered with dust. As he approached he seemed to recognize David and turned toward him; when he reached him he threw himself on the ground and did obeisance.

"Where do you come from?" asked David, as the man stood up.

"I have escaped from the camp of Israel," was the answer.

"Well?" said David, eagerly; "how did the battle go? Tell me!" But he knew the answer before he heard it.

"The Israelites were defeated and fled; many of them have been killed; Saul and Jonathan are among the dead."

Saul—yes, but Jonathan too!

"How do you know that Saul and Jonathan are dead?" David asked, a faint doubt—was it a hope?—still lingering in his mind.

"I happened to be on Mount Gilboa at the time of the battle. The Israelites began running away almost directly, and Jonathan was killed in the flight. I went among the men who were lying on the ground, dead or wounded, to see . . . what was going on . . . and I came upon Saul leaning on

his spear. When he saw me he called to me and I went to him. He asked me to take his sword and kill him, for he had been wounded by an arrow and was afraid of the Philistines. As he was speaking he fell down; so I took his sword and killed him. And I took his diadem and his armlet and have brought them to you, my lord, hoping to find favor in your eyes and a reward for bringing the news of your enemy's death."

The man spoke glibly, almost as if he had rehearsed the words beforehand.

David stared at him, and for a while made no answer. Then he said slowly:

"Of what tribe are you?"

"I am the son of a stranger," answered the man, "an Amalekite."

"An Amalekite!" said David. "And how is it that you were not afraid to lay your hands on the sacred body of Yahweh's anointed? And do you come to me for a reward? Joab! Take this man and put him to death."

The wretched man gave a loud scream.

"My lord, my lord, have mercy! it was a lie! I did not touch him! He was dead when I came near—I stole the diadem and armlet from his body —mercy! mercy!"

But David turned away without listening to his cries and protestations, and Joab soon silenced him forever.

For the rest of the day David and the people of Ziklag at his orders gave themselves up to mourning. They tore their clothes, poured dust on their heads, uttered the shrill wails of formal grief, and fasted till the evening. Then, as the men sat round in the darkness, still meditating gloomily on the fallen splendors of Israel and the house of Saul, David sent for his harp, and broke out into a great dirge:

Hear, O Judah, hard things,
Be grieved, O Israel;
Upon thy heights lie the slain;
How are the mighty fallen!

Tell it not in Gath,
Publish it not in the streets of Ashkelon,
Lest the daughters of the Philistines rejoice,
Lest the daughters of the uncircumcised triumph.

May no dew descend on you, mountains of Gilboa,
Let there be no rain upon you, fields of death!
For there was cast away the shield of heroes,
The shield of Saul as though he had not been anointed with oil.

From the blood of the slain,
From the fat of the mighty,
The bow of Jonathan turned not back,
And the sword of Saul returned not empty.

Saul and Jonathan, the loved and the lovely,
As in life so in death, they were not divided,
They were swifter than eagles,
They were stronger than lions.

Ye daughters of Israel, weep over Saul,
Who clothed you in purple and fine linen,
Who put ornaments of gold upon your apparel.

How are the mighty fallen
In the midst of the battle!
Jonathan, by thy death
My heart is pierced through.

I am distressed for thee, my brother;
Very pleasant hast thou been unto me:
Thy love to me was wonderful,
Passing the love of women.

How are the mighty fallen,
And the weapons of war perished!

Book II

THE KING

"And he gave them their desire and sent leanness withal into their soul."—Ps. cvi, 15.

PART I

THE KINGDOM

Chapter I

THE situation caused by the death of Saul did not find David unprepared. There was now no reason why he should not return to Judah, and his arrival would provide a center for rallying the Hebrew tribes so violently shattered by the disaster on Mount Gilboa. He had not, at first, thought of consulting Yahweh as to the advisability of a move. Before, however, he had taken any overt step, rumors reached him from various sources that the men of Judah intended to make him king. This, he thought, altered the case. He was determined that everything connected with the throne and his approach to it should be surrounded by the greatest possible sanctity, and put under the special protection of Yahweh himself. He therefore called a solemn assembly of all his men, at which Abiathar consulted the sacred oracle, and announced that it

was the will of Yahweh for them to return to Judah, to the city of Hebron.

It soon became evident that the rumors as to the intentions of the Judeans were correct. One by one the chief men of the countryside came up to Hebron to have a personal interview with David, and to suggest the importance of a consecrated leader. After a few months of inevitable diplomacy and formality an agreement was come to, and David was anointed king of Judah.

The Northern tribes all this time had held aloof. They sent no messages to David, and it was only after a considerable time that he discovered what had been going on there. Abner had rallied what remained of the Israelite army, had taken the insignificant Ishbaal, the last survivor of Saul's sons, to Mahanaim, in Gilead on the other side of the Jordan, and declared him to be king of Israel in his father's place. David shrugged his shoulders when he heard the news. He realized that it would mean trouble between Israel and Judah, but he was certain that the combination of Ishbaal as king and Abner as commander of the army was too unstable to last long—to say nothing of the attitude of the Philistines.

He himself was determined to stand well with his late masters, at any rate for the present. He

sent a message to Achish, excusing himself for having left Ziklag, and suggesting that they might come to some arrangement as to his remaining in Hebron as king of Judah, undisturbed by the Philistines.

Meanwhile another piece of news percolated through from the north. After the battle of Mount Gilboa the Philistines had seized the bodies of Saul and his sons, sent their armor to the temple of Ashtaroth at Ashkelon, and fastened the bodies up on the wall beside the chief gate of Beth-Shan, a town in the valley of Jezreel. Presently it was whispered that during the night the bodies had mysteriously disappeared from the wall, and there was great rejoicing among the Hebrews and much wondering as to who had carried out the daring raid. Eventually it leaked out that it had been accomplished by the men of Jabesh Gilead in gratitude to Saul, who in his early days had saved the town from destruction. David immediately seized the opportunity to get into touch with them. He sent a message announcing that as Saul was dead the men of Judah had anointed him king in his place; he thanked them for their piety and fidelity in burying the last king and hoped that they would now give their loyal support to himself, Saul's true successor. Jabesh was too closely under Abner's eye for David to expect much response to this sugges-

tion, but his messenger brought back word that it had not been ill received.

It was not long before Abner showed that he had no intention of allowing David's claim to be Saul's successor, even over the southern tribes, to pass undisputed. He, too, must have made some sort of agreement with the Philistines, for he was soon heard of at the head of an army on the west bank of the Jordan marching south, and announcing that he was going to make mince-meat of the upstart king of Judah. Just at this moment messengers from Achish arrived, and David, reluctant to leave the delicate negotiations it was necessary to enter into, decided that he must stay at Hebron, and entrusted the repulse of Abner's army to Joab.

The conversations with Achish's envoy turned out very satisfactorily. David agreed to pay a yearly tribute to Achish, who, it seemed, was willing to accept a by no means exorbitant sum, and would look upon himself as David's suzerain. Everything was settled in a friendly manner, and the embassy sent politely back to Gath, while David began to wonder what had happened to Joab, and why he sent no news to Hebron. At last, in the early dawn, the sound of tramping men was heard. Joab was immediately shown in to David and his

heavy, scowling face announced some black disaster.

"What is it, Joab?" David asked anxiously. "What went wrong? You do not seem to have had very heavy losses. . . ."

"Asahel," answered Joab heavily.

"Asahel! Asahel killed?" David groaned and hid his face in his hands.

"But I 'll have Abner's life for it yet," growled Joab. "He may be thankful he escaped this time. . . ."

"Tell me everything that happened," said David after a little, and Joab went on:

"We met them by the pool of Gibeon—we were on one side and they on the other. Abner suggested that some of the young men should have a sham fight and I agreed, so twelve Benjamites stood up and twelve of ours went across to them. They were to fight in pairs—but I don't know what happened, only they all used their swords and the whole lot of them were killed—they killed each other, somehow. Well, then we went for them and they bolted. Asahel—you know how he could run—was on ahead of us all, making for Abner, who was behind his men. Abner turned round and I heard him call out, 'Go for some one else, Asahel; I don't

want to kill you.' But Asahel went straight on, and when he got near, Abner turned his spear round and pushed it backward right through Asahel's body. . . ." Joab stopped; and after a while began again:

"Abishai and I went on without stopping and most of our men did too, and we killed a good many of them. About sunset they got together on to a hill and Abner proposed a truce. We were all pretty tired by then and I agreed on condition Abner went back to Gilead. He consented and I watched him go off. We went back and took Asahel to Bethlehem and buried him there. . . . We lost nineteen men and Asahel—I should think the Benjamites lost over three hundred. . . ."

Chapter II

Not long after David came to Hebron his eldest son was born. He called the child Amnon, and was inordinately proud and fond of him. Just after he was anointed king the second boy, Chileab, was born, and to his great grief Abigail died in giving him birth. David had already entered into negotiations with Talmai, king of Geshur, for the

hand of his daughter Maacah, and presently he took another wife, Eglah, and two concubines.

At the same time that he was enlarging his private establishment he developed the administration of the country. The army was still his chief concern, for the war with Ishbaal dragged on, and besides he always kept in his mind the necessity for a future war with the Philistines. He had an elaborate system of officers—three heads of divisions, and thirty subordinates—most of these were men who had been with him in the wilderness and at Ziklag; and indeed the whole scheme was a development of what had existed in embryo there. His most important innovation was the establishment of a Philistine bodyguard, with a northern and a southern division—the Pelethites and the Cherethites—under the command of Benaiah the son of Jehoiada, one of the most distinguished of his fighters.

David had persuaded Elihu, after the battle of Mount Gilboa, to return to Israel, and, when Abner had established some order, to put himself in the service of Ishbaal. He was, however, not surprised when, after the war between Judah and Israel had been going on for some time, Elihu presented himself at Hebron. What *did* surprise him was that Elihu declared he was a messenger from Abner. David could not help smiling at this incongruous

choice of an ambassador, and in spite of the official nature of his visit insisted on seeing him alone, for he was convinced that an informal conversation would be more profitable as well as more entertaining than a ceremonious court interview. He had no difficulty in persuading Elihu that this arrangement was the most flattering that could be made.

"Well, David," began the exalted one, "it 's wonderful to think, is n't it, how we 've both got on in the world! I an ambassador and you a king! And fancy, when first we met I was the servant of an old prophet and you kept sheep on the hillside!"

"True," said David, gravely, "but worth will tell in the end!"

"So it will, so it will! Though I shall always say it was my doing that you got your start, in coming to Saul's court—not that I deny you were a good fighter in your youth, and no doubt it helped you on a bit killing Goliath of Gath single-handed, in front of two armies."

"Not as much as your bringing me to Gibeah in the first place," answered David, with an inward smile. "But now, as regards this embassy from Abner. . . ."

"Ah! Abner! What a man he is! But you 'd hardly know him now, David, he 's so important. Nothing can be done without him—why the king

himself gives way to him, and—would you believe it—he actually had an affair with Rizpah!"

"What do you mean? Rizpah the daughter of Aiah? Saul's concubine?"

"Ah, I thought that would surprise you—but he made no secret of it!"

"But is he, then, going to make himself king of Israel?" asked David, in amazement, for the king's harem passed with the crown to his successor, and to take a dead ruler's widow was to lay claim to his kingdom.

"Just what we all wanted to know, and, as you may suppose, Ishbaal was in a pretty state of excitement. It seems he tried to speak to Abner alone, but Abner would n't go to him, so at last he made up his mind to question him in front of us all, but when it came to the point he was so flustered that all he could say was: 'Why did you go in to my father's concubine?' Well, Abner flew into such a rage as you never saw. 'Am I a dog's head?' he shouted. 'Here am I, showing kindness to your father's house and friends, saving you from David—and small chance you 'd have against *him,* and now you pester me with some nonsense about a woman!' All this time he was shaking his fist in Ishbaal's face in quite an alarming manner. 'All right,' he went on, yelling as loud as ever, 'all

right, I 've done with you—let the kingdom be taken from the house of Saul—let David set up his throne over Israel and over Judah, from Dan to Beersheba. I 've done with you!' and with that he rushed out. As for Ishbaal, he sat there as white as a sheet and never said a word. But the best of it is that Abner means every word of it, and that 's what he 's sent me to you for."

"That?" Again David could hardly believe his ears. "To make me king of Israel? Are you sure, Elihu? It 's such a strange tale."

"It *is* a strange tale, and I 'm not surprised you hardly believe it—I don't know that I should if you were to tell it to me. But it 's true enough all the same. He 's sent out other messengers as well as me—to all the tribes of Israel—telling them you ought to be king—he sent specially to Benjamin, I know, for I came as far as Gibeah with the man, myself."

David pondered for a long time. The whole thing sounded like an outburst of frenzy; but he knew that Abner could break out sometimes, like his cousin Saul, and he supposed now there was no one to control him.

"Well, Elihu," he said at last, "you have n't given me the message yet."

"Why, nor have I!" exclaimed Elihu. "Fancy

my forgetting that! Well, this is the message—I know the words quite well, for I learnt them by heart so as to make no mistake—'Abner of Benjamin to David, king of Judah: The land is under my hand to give it to whom I please. Make a league with me and I will help you and bring all Israel under your rule.' "

David thought again.

"And this is my answer, Elihu, learn it as well as you learnt your message to me: David, the anointed of Yahweh to Abner: I will make a league with you, but I will not see you, nor go further in the matter unless you first deliver to me my wife Michal, Saul's daughter!"

"Saul's daughter! Of course! Ah, David, do not I remember your betrothal and the price you paid for it! Well, I sha'n't forget your answer; you may be sure of that! . . ."

Chapter III

David felt extremely doubtful as to Abner's object in opening these negotiations with him. He thought, however, that the demand for Michal would be a slight test of good faith, while if he succeeded in

obtaining her, his position as successor to Saul would undoubtedly be strengthened.

But he need have felt no doubts. Abner was irritated by Ishbaal's flabby futility, and had really been enraged by his attempted interference over Rizpah. Recognizing that he could not get the kingdom for himself, he determined that it would be better to serve under a king who was a *man* instead of a doll, and resolved to do everything he could to satisfy David's conditions.

After talking to Elihu on his return he came to the conclusion that it would be best for him to see David in person, in order to discuss the situation. David, however, had sent word that he would not see him unless Michal had been delivered to him—the simplest thing, therefore, would be to take her with him. He accordingly set out, accompanied by twenty men, first sending word to Paltiel to meet him with her at Bahurim at the top of the way down to the ford over Jordan. The unhappy Paltiel, guessing only too well what this order meant, dared not disobey it, and went off to the meeting place. Abner was there waiting for him; he gave one glance at Michal to make sure it was she and then turned to one of his men.

"Here, Abimelech, take charge of her. See she

has what she wants, but don't lose sight of her. Now, Paltiel, be off."

Paltiel, the tears streaming down his face, was caressing his wife, and sobbing out his last farewell; but Abner was in a hurry to start. Paltiel was pulled away and pushed off toward home, sobbing as he went. Michal sat absolutely rigid, without a word or a tear.

David, who always kept himself closely informed as to what was going on among the tribes, had heard of Abner's approach. His first consideration was to get Joab and Abishai out of the way, for he really wanted to see Abner and was afraid that the blood feud between him and his nephews might lead to a disaster, which would prevent it before he could intervene. The sons of Zeruiah were therefore sent off on an expedition against the Amalekites, who had been giving trouble again, and David hoped to get them out of Judah before they had a chance of hearing that Abner was at hand.

The day after they had gone Abner arrived. David received Michal publicly and ceremoniously, and himself led her to his harem. Then he returned to Abner, ordering every one else to withdraw.

"Well, Abner," began David, "it is a long time

since we met . . . more than ten years—is it not?"

"Yes—my lord—" answered Abner choking and making a grimace over the honorific as if it were nasty medicine. "And my lord has prospered wonderfully. . . ."

David laughed genially.

"Come, Abner, while we are alone won't you remember that you knew me as a boy who played the harp and did nothing else in particular, and call me David?" Abner began to thaw, and David went on: "And how do you like being in Gilead? Mahanaim is n't much of a town compared with Gibeah, I suppose."

"Horrible—perfectly horrible—and to think of Benjamin being all this time in the hands of the Philistines—and not a blow struck to get it back!"

"Well, I don't know whether it 's due to Ishbaal or to you, Abner, but all the blows that *have* been struck have been against Judah."

"Nothing more true—and in order to be free to do it we pay tribute to the uncircumcised dogs, instead of leaguing ourselves with you to shake them off—but I 've done with such folly forever!" exclaimed Abner, conveniently forgetting that he alone was the author of the policy he was so ardently condemning.

"I hear something of a dispute between you and

the king of Israel," said David, cautiously, and Abner broke out again:

"Ah, he treated me like a dog!—but I 've had enough of him and his whining ways, and so I said to him. The Israelites will listen to what I say, and I shall tell them—I 've told them already —that we want a *man* to be our ruler and that *you* are the man we want."

"That 's very flattering of you—and no doubt you deal persuasively with the leaders of Israel—but I expect you find it takes even you all your skill to convince—say, the Benjamites, that I should make a better king for them than some one of the house of Saul."

"You might think so—I thought so myself till I began sounding them, but I assure you, David, there is but one wish among them, and that is to have you as their king."

David stared at Abner, listening attentively to what he said. He was becoming convinced that Abner was right in his estimate of public opinion in the North—his own private information bore out Abner's view, and he could not see that it was to any one's interest to deceive him. But if this was true, if the tribes of themselves were anxious to shake off Ishbaal's so-called rule, if Abner's persuasions were—as he himself maintained—in

reality superfluous, then the importance of Abner to David as a go-between was certainly diminished.

"Well," said David, thoughtfully, "I see no reason why I should not consent to rule over the Israelites if they really desire it. But mind, Abner, no one is to lay a finger on Ishbaal—I will deal with him myself, do you understand?"

"Very well," answered Abner, carelessly, "I dare say he 's not worth touching—he 'll never interfere with you."

"And now, as regards yourself—you will expect some recognition of your services?"

"There 's only one thing I want, David, but I *must* have it." ("Must," thought David; "that's a bad beginning.") "You must give me command of the whole army—immediately under yourself, of course."

"No one is better fitted for it, certainly," answered David, "but . . . there are one or two difficulties in the way—for instance, Joab. He 's not exactly in command, but he 's always been next to me, all the years we were in exile, and I don't know. . . ."

"Well, you 'll have to make up your mind about that. I sha'n't come unless I 'm to have that position. And as for Joab and Abishai, it 's perfect

nonsense for them to give themselves the airs they do—young upstarts! You want to keep a firmer hand on them, David."

David was thinking that this was not a very hopeful mood in which to enter into relations with men with whom one had a blood feud. He foresaw endless difficulties over this arrangement—open quarrels, hidden intrigues—and yet, though Abner might not be essential in bringing the Israelite tribes over to him, if he were sent away vexed and disappointed he might easily alienate them and stir up war again. He thought he must close with Abner's proposal—at present—and see if anything turned up.

"There is a good deal in what you say, Abner. There 's no doubt you 've had more experience than any of us, and would be quite invaluable as a leader. I think you may consider that as settled, then. Bring the Northern tribes over to me, and when I am king of Israel you shall have chief command of the army."

So the compact was made. David, with a vague feeling that he did not want Abner to go immediately —with some idea that he might even yet find some other way of settling with him—ordered a sacrifice to Yahweh and a feast for the Israelites. At last

they could be detained no longer. With many salutations and good wishes they bade farewell, and Abner and his twenty men left the palace.

They had not been gone long when into the room where David was sitting alone burst the unceremonious Joab. David looked at him in astonishment, but Joab was too excited and too angry to be checked by expressive looks.

"What 's this I hear, David? Is it true Abner has been to see you? And have you let him go again?"

"Yes, he has been—what 's the matter with you, Joab?"

"Why did n't you keep him till I got back? You know I want his blood. . . ."

An idea—a possible solution of his difficulty—was occurring to David.

"Abner has been arranging to leave Ishbaal and to come over to us. He 's such an experienced general he 'll be a great asset for us, won't he?"

"Experienced! experienced in losing battles, you mean. And I suppose he 's to be set over us. . . ."

"Of course. He 's to bring the Northern tribes over, too."

"You were n't taken in by all that, were you? Of course he only came to spy on you. . . ."

"I don't think so. If you 'd seen him I think he would have convinced you. It 's a pity you missed him. He 's only just gone, and he can't have got far yet—he 'd only twenty men with him."

Joab was silent—glared at David—and rushed out of the room as wildly as he had rushed in.

For a long time David sat alone, pondering the situation. He was beginning to wonder if he had done right, and to feel uncomfortable. If anything *were* to happen to Abner . . . would it not look rather like treachery? Would he be able to persuade the Israelites that he was innocent? . . . On the other hand, Ishbaal alone would be easy enough to deal with—and Abner would always have been —*be*—a center of difficulties. . . . If Joab . . . took action—he would have to be prepared with his own attitude.

Presently he began to hear sounds which suggested that something had happened. A low murmur—one or two shrill cries—an increased noise, and a sudden hush. He pulled himself together, got up, and went out into the courtyard. It was full of men and women all struggling to look at something in the middle of the court; directly David appeared they fell back, and he saw the dead body of Abner lying on its back, a thin trickle of blood dripping from the stomach.

Chapter IV

For a moment David gazed without speaking, then turning to the man nearest him he said darkly: "How did this happen? It is barely two hours since Abner left me. Which of you dared to do this?"

There was a silence. Those near David shuffled uncomfortably, hung their heads, or looked at each other nervously. At last those in the crowd farthest away began murmuring, and presently, in the murmur, the word *Joab* could be distinguished.

"Joab!" exclaimed the king, suddenly, "where is Joab? He was with me only a little while ago—why is he not here?"

Still nobody liked to answer, and David's eye roved over the group of onlookers. It fell on a man he knew to have been on the foray with Joab, and he singled him out at once.

"You—what is your name—son of Ahasbai—come out here—and answer me the truth. Who killed Abner? Was it Joab the son of Zeruiah?"

"I—I think so, my lord."

"But how did it happen? Abner had left my presence before Joab returned to Hebron."

"My lord, I think Abner had not left the town

long before Joab was in pursuit of him. He sent Naharai after him, and Naharai caught him up at the well of Sirah and asked him to come back. Joab met him in the gate and took him to one side to speak to him and—and—"

"And what? Speak up, man."

"Struck his spear into Abner's stomach. . . ."

"Yes," said a man from the other side of the court, "and called out as he did it '*So* you struck Asahel, Benjamite!' "

David glanced at the body and then looked impatiently around.

"Will none of you fetch Joab? Must I wait for him all day?" But as he spoke the throng opened and Joab stood before him.

The two men looked at each other—Joab's face still distorted by the passions of revenge and jealousy that had driven him to murder, David's feelings masked by an expression of severity while his eyes searched Joab's to see if his held any tinge of suspicion. He saw none.

"Did you kill this man?" asked David, sternly and coldly.

"I did," was the passionate reply; "did not he kill my brother Asahel?"

"Then listen to me, all you Hebrews, and listen to me, Joab son of Zeruiah. I and my kingdom

are guiltless before Yahweh forever of the blood of Abner son of Ner; let it fall upon the head of Joab and upon all his father's house. And may every one of the house of Joab suffer from leprosy or fall by the sword, or want bread—or may there be none but women."

While David was speaking, coldly yet with a terrible fierceness, Joab's passion seemed to die out. He shivered at the dreadful imprecations and looked at David,—white now—and apparently bewildered.

The king turned from Joab and walked over to the body of Abner. Stooping down, he picked up some dust, and throwing it over his head spoke again: "A prince and a great man of Israel has fallen to-day, and to-day I am weak and helpless though anointed king; for these men, the sons of Zeruiah, are too hard for me—but Yahweh will reward the wicked doer according to his wickedness."

"So be it!" said a voice in the crowd suddenly. David shivered, but nothing followed.

His next step was to order the whole town of Hebron to mourn for the dead Israelite, to rend their clothes, put on sackcloth, and make loud lamentations. He himself refused to touch food till the sun went down, and followed the bier to the

burial place. Then he called for his harp and sang a dirge:

Must Abner die as dies the fool?
Thy hands were not bound
Nor thy feet put into fetters;
But as a man falleth before the children of iniquity
so didst thou fall.

The children of iniquity—Joab and Abishai—were obliged to mourn too for their blood enemy. Joab said nothing, but his face still wore a puzzled expression.

Chapter V

When the news of Abner's murder reached the Israelite tribes there came with it the news of David's curse on Joab and the mourning of the whole city of Hebron. The Israelites, who for so many years had suffered from the weakness of their rulers, and had begun to turn hopeful eyes toward the king of Judah, were eager to believe that he had no complicity in the Northern leader's death, and accepted his explanations at their face value. If there were any cavilers who asked why he had not

punished the guilty man instead of cursing him, they were answered that Yahweh's punishment would be the worse—or that, after all, Joab and Abishai were the king's own nephews—or merely by a shrug of the shoulders. No one wanted to accentuate any breach between Judah and Israel.

Meanwhile, what were the relations between David and Michal? Michal had not arrived at Hebron in a very favorable mood. She was unhappy at being torn away from her home, her real husband, and above all from her babies. She was annoyed at being thrust into a harem where she was very far from holding an important place, while her pride was wounded by the idea that such a place was nevertheless hers by right. If her thoughts of David were tinged with romance, there was also among them a flavor of embarrassment—she wondered nervously how they would meet after their strange parting thirteen years ago. With all this she was not in a state to be a very conciliating member of the harem. The other women, instinctively leagued together against a newcomer—especially one who from her history might prove a dangerous rival—received her with scarcely veiled hostility; to which Michal responded with a sharp tongue which had not been softened by years.

When David went into the women's apartments, after the mourning for Abner was over, he found a general atmosphere of acidity. Michal had somehow caused a quarrel between the two little boys of five and six, Absalom and Amnon, which had naturally spread to their mothers, Maacah and Ahinoam; and the disagreement of the latter had only been settled by a joint attack on Michal. It was at this moment that David entered. Absalom ran up to him complaining that Amnon was naughty, to which Amnon replied by pouting out his lower lip, pointing at Michal, and saying:

"I don't like *her.*"

David laughed, picked up both the children, one under each arm, and in a few moments had romped them into good temper again. Michal stood silent and disapproving on one side, and when David turned to her with his brilliant smile remarked coldly:

"Well, of course, that 's *one* way of bringing up children. I 'm thankful to say *Paltiel* did n't encourage them to be impertinent by laughing at their rudeness—but I suppose things are different in Judah."

The other women stared at this extraordinary speech. David muttered something vague into his

beard and left the room. It was evidently impossible to gather up the threads that he and Michal had dropped—at any rate at that moment.

Not long after Abner's death Elihu again made his appearance at Hebron, but this time, he announced, he had come to stay.

"I 'm getting old, David, and can't go traveling about as I used to do. Besides, I can't stand the life at Mahanaim."

"Can't stand the life? What do you mean, Elihu?"

"Well, since Abner was killed the whole place has more or less gone to ruin. Ishbaal can't do anything—he 's got nothing to pay any one with —why, he can hardly find enough to feed himself. So naturally every one is leaving him. Why—would you believe it!—he's only got a woman to keep the door! Well, when I saw that I said to myself, 'No, things have gone too far! I might as well be in *David's* service in Judah, as stay with this Ishbaal and his one maidservant.' "

"And is there no one in command of the soldiers?"

"Hm—soldiers! There are two fellows, Baanah and Rechab, sons of a Rimmon, a man of Beeroth —I believe they 've set themselves up in some way

or other—but lord, David, they're poor trash—they won't last long."

Elihu was right.

A few weeks after his account of the decadence of Ishbaal's court it was announced to the king of Judah that two men from Mahanaim begged for an audience. Their names, it appeared, were Baanah and Rechab, and David, supposing that they might bring a message from Ishbaal—an appeal, perhaps, for protection—ordered them to be admitted.

They came into the room where he was sitting with his advisers, and he decided at the first glance that he did not like them. They were rough, dirty, and down at heel; they combined an air of blustering swagger with cringing servility, and below it all David was certain they were trying to conceal an intermittent panic.

"Well?" he said coldly as they made their obeisance.

"The blessing of Yahweh be upon you—" began one of the men, but David cut him short.

"That is enough. Go on with your message."

"Message?" The man looked stupid, and rolled his eyes strangely. David shrugged his shoulders.

"Well—whatever it is you came to say—out with it."

The other man, who had not yet spoken but had been standing awkwardly, holding something hidden in his clothes, made a rapid movement and suddenly flung at David's feet a human head. His counselors started back with exclamations of horror; David alone did not move a muscle, but his eyes shone fiercely.

"What is the meaning of this?" He spoke in a voice so low but so menacing that the men instinctively flung themselves on the ground, and one of them began a hasty explanation.

"My lord, we were in Mahanaim. And at midday, when every one was asleep, we went to Ishbaal's house—there was no one there except the woman who keeps the door, and she was asleep too—Ishbaal was lying on his bed in the inner room, and we killed him, and took off his head."

David's face was like adamant, and the miserable man went on, desperately talking faster and more hoarsely as his agony increased.

"And we have brought it to my lord—the head of Ishbaal, the son of Saul, who tried to kill you; to-day Yahweh has avenged my lord the king by the death of his enemy's son."

There was a dead silence except for the panting gasps of the Israelites.

"And did no one ever tell you," said David at last slowly and relentlessly, "how many years ago when a man came to me at Ziklag and said, 'Saul is dead,' thinking to bring good news, that the reward I gave him was to kill him? How much more shall I reward wicked men who went into an innocent person's house and killed him on his bed? Have you also forgotten that the king is the anointed of Yahweh? And how shall I teach this lesson to you, men of Israel?"

Suddenly one of the wretches began to scream, crawling toward David and trying to grasp his clothes. David recoiled violently, pulling his robe away with a face of disgust.

"Take them out, Abishai, and kill them," he said, "cut off their feet and hands and hang them up by the pool of Hebron. As for that"—glancing at the unfortunate Ishbaal's head—"let it be buried in the grave of Abner."

Three months afterward David was anointed king of Israel.

Chapter VI

How little did the giddy height to which David had climbed resemble what he had anticipated when he had gazed at it from below! For years it had seemed a pinnacle beyond which there would be nothing to aim at, a resting place where he could take his ease and enjoy peace and plenty. To the shepherd of Bethlehem the king of Israel had seemed a being endowed with irresistible power and inexhaustible wealth, who had nothing to do but give orders to others while he reveled in the satisfaction of the senses, and nothing to wish for since all his ambitions were gratified. He could not help smiling at the childish conception, though how and when it had changed he could hardly have told. No doubt his sojourn in Philistia had shown him in concrete shape a power—wealth—civilization—hitherto unimagined; but it was rather what he had guessed at than what he had seen, that had served to enlighten him; it was the gradual realization,—still, it occurred to him, only partial,—of what lay behind it all, that had been his true education. Philistia, rich and strong, was yet only rich and strong because through her flowed the riches and strength of other nations. Syria—Damascus

ardent with gold and horses, Phœnicia with her Tyre and Sidon, queen of the mysterious, enchanting, terrible sea—made him understand that besides the Philistia he had seen and known there were many other nations as great and powerful to whom the Hebrew people were but a group of insignificant tribes. But beyond these—glimpsed at, divined, apprehended perhaps more truly in his dreams than by his reason—lay south and east the tremendous immemorial empires Egypt and Assyria. Their caravans crossed and recrossed before his eyes on the great road through Gaza, and his thoughts followed them to the unseen splendors which he surmised but could not imagine to himself. And so experience and vision combined to show him the kingdom of Judah and Israel as a leaf on a tree, and the world which had once been bounded by the hills of Moab and the plains of Philistia now stretched beyond the desert—beyond the sea—beyond the horizon of dreams.

Another vision had come to him—the vision of time. In his stormy youth he had always looked from the dangers of the present to a future of his own making in which his deepest longings would be fulfilled and his strangest fantasies accomplished. Now, in the prime of his age, his dreams of the future began to take a new direction. He was a

father. He could not expect much more than thirty more years of life for himself, but his sons, and his sons' sons, and their sons again—why should not they—and he in them—live forever and forever? And if in thirty years he could hardly expect to stretch his kingdom to conflict with the shadowy gigantic empires on the boundary of his thought, yet in the eternity that lay before his descendants why should even Egypt and Assyria be the ultimate limit?

But for all this the foundation must be securely laid in the present. And here again was a difference between anticipation and reality. Ease and enjoyment seemed as far from him as when he was an outlaw in Adullam, for if his bed was softer and his food more plentiful, his anxieties and responsibilities were a thousand times more numerous and more terrible. Yet, just as in those days his physical dangers had always excited and exhilarated him, so now the problems of diplomacy and administration stimulated all his powers, and thrilled him with a sense of controlling forces even more dangerous than antagonists of flesh and blood.

One of the most pressing of these problems was the question of the new kingdom's capital. With increasing clearness it was being borne in upon him that Hebron was not a suitable place for the seat of

administration and the king's dwelling place. Convenient enough for the king of Judah, it was too far south for a proper control of Israel, and too deeply associated with the tribe of Judah not to be an annoyance to the Northern tribes. The choice of Bethlehem, though it lay further north, would, as his own birthplace, give rise even more surely to jealousies and discontents. On the other hand, a Northern capital would equally displease his own tribe, and besides, what Northern town could he choose? Bethel, the largest and most important, was as far north as Hebron was south, and would be too easy a prey to any attacking force to make him override the obvious objections. He could come to no satisfactory decision.

Yet a decision was urgently needed. The country was by no means in a settled condition. Raids were constantly being made by the outlying tribes, and even occasionally by those settlements of Canaanites which had not been completely subdued or absorbed. The Jebusites in Jerusalem were among the most vexatious of these raiders, lying as they did like an island between Judah and Israel, and commanding the trunk road that united the two kingdoms. Moreover, Jerusalem was at the head of a pass into the heart of Philistia, and David, certain he would soon have trouble from that source,

was set on himself holding every possible position of vantage.

Such were the thoughts that, in the days following his anointment as king of Israel, pursued and perplexed David. He was uneasy and restless, and could not so much as make up his mind which was the most pressing matter to take in hand. The question of the capital was at bottom the most important, yet after all that decision could be postponed; it was the little disorders and forays, trifling as they were, which seemed to demand immediate attention. Of these disorders the raids of the Jebusites were the most irritating, and gradually the irritation increased till, as is always the case with a sore place, Jerusalem and the Jebusites seemed upon him at every turn, forever interposing between himself and all his thoughts of wider policy.

After weeks of vexation the solution came in a flash. He would settle one difficulty by means of the other. He would take Jerusalem and make *it* the capital. The situation was perfect—central, so that North and South were equally accessible, neutral, so that there would be no jealousies between Israel and Judah.

"And moreover, Gad," he concluded when explaining his project, "an unfailing water supply!"

Joab and Abishai were still out of favor, but

David felt he must talk things over with some one, and had sent out for Gad and Nathan, a young prophet who lived with him.

Gad stared at him and his jaw fell.

"But," he protested, slowly and doubtfully, "the town can't be taken—it 's held out against every assault for generations. . . ."

David roared with laughter.

"Another advantage!" he exclaimed. "The capital of my kingdom *should* be impregnable! What do you say, Nathan?"

The young man looked up from the ground.

"What city is impregnable to the warriors of Yahweh? And if he defend it, who shall take it?"

David's eyes gleamed even more brightly than before.

"You speak truly, Nathan," he said, "for Yahweh is my helper."

Chapter VII

David made no delay in his preparations. The next morning he called a council of his chief officers, informed them of his intentions, and asked their opinions. In cold blood the opinion of most of

them would have been that the thing was impossible; but as described by David, his mellow voice soft for persuasion, his blue eyes bright with eagerness, not one of them could have borne to suggest even a difficulty. They agreed that the attempt should be made at once, and the fighting men of the tribes summoned.

"Very well," said David, standing up to dissolve the council, and smiling with delight at the ease with which he had convinced them, "I suppose your men are in good training, Benaiah? But I need not ask. And, oh,"—turning to Joab, with a smile his nephew had not seen for many months—"I have decided to give the command over all the men of Israel and Judah to him who first reaches the walls of Jerusalem."

Joab looked up eagerly, and stepped forward.

"You mean that? Whoever it is?"

"Of course I mean it," answered David, in a friendly voice, "and I have a good guess who it will be." He put his hand on Joab's arm and then turned away to give instructions to Seraiah the scribe. But Joab was satisfied; he heaved a deep sigh. David was tired of being angry with him, and was giving him this opportunity to regain, and more than regain, his former position. The project for the attack on Jerusalem had now no more

ardent supporter than Joab the son of Zeruiah.

The news of David's intentions soon spread over the country, and could not be concealed from the Jebusites themselves. One day David, coming upon a group of soldiers disputing peevishly but with a dispirited air, stopped to listen to their talk.

"The man was a liar—he was a shepherd from Tekoa."

"What does that matter? What he said was true."

"How does he know what the Jebusites said? Did they tell him?"

"Yes, and told him to come to Hebron with the news."

"What news?" asked David, and the men started at the sudden appearance of the king in their midst.

"It was a shepherd from Tekoa," answered one of the men, nervously, "and it seems the Jebusites know we are coming against them, and have sent word that the walls of Jerusalem will be strong enough to keep us out, though only the blind and the lame take arms against us."

"And it is a true saying," mumbled another, looking on the ground.

"We all know Jerusalem cannot be taken," groaned a third—but he was at the other edge of the circle and out of sight.

"A true saying!" David laughed so heartily that the men around him smiled almost involuntarily. "It is true enough that the Jebusites are all blind and lame, and will hide behind their walls when we come up against them, but I doubt whether that will save them from our swords! It is they who tell you that Jerusalem cannot be taken, but we shall show them something that will surprise them. Could the walls of Jericho stand against Yahweh? And what are the walls of Jerusalem?"

He left them cheerful and confident, but it was clear that the more the difficulties were talked over the greater they would grow. As soon as possible the army marched, and the next day David had his plan of attack ready. Fired with his own enthusiasm and certainty of success, the Israelites rushed headlong up the stony water course to the south of the citadel. A band of the strongest and most reckless, eager for the coveted post of commander, led the fierce throng, but Joab outdistanced them all; and when David, at the end of the hot, triumphant day, saw the amazed and terrified Jebusites escaping as fast as they could over the shoulder of the hill, he felt that the pleasure of his victory was made complete as he joyfully embraced his nephew, and hailed him leader of all the army.

David lost no time in converting his new

acquisition into the chief town of the kingdom. He turned the Jebusites out of the citadel, but allowed them to make houses on the slope beyond, and did not interfere with their worship of their own Baal. The citadel itself he called *David's city*—it was to have no tribal connections, but was to be a center to which Israelites and Judeans alike could turn. Within the citadel he arranged dwelling places for himself and his family, his chief counselors, and the Philistine guard. Beyond were gathered his clients, any of his tribesmen who wished to make homes in the royal city, and a few traders who foresaw that it would soon be an excellent center for commerce. The military importance of his capital he reinforced by building around it a fortification called Millo, and at the same time he set to work on an armory which should provide his soldiers with as many iron weapons as they required, and perhaps would later on be able to supply battering-rams, and other siege instruments.

In the midst of all these activities an embassy reached Jerusalem. It was an embassy from Abibaal, king of Tyre, sent to congratulate David on his coming to the throne. It was the first of such customary embassies to be received by the king of Israel, and the recognition filled him with a sense of growing importance—he was no longer a mere

tribal chief but was accepted as a king by kings. He received the ambassadors with as much pomp as he could achieve, but, remembering the palaces of the Philistine rulers, he was ashamed at the meanness of his own habitation; and the ambassadors returned to Tyre with a letter written by Seraiah the scribe, thanking Abibaal for his good wishes, and begging him to send to Jerusalem masons, carpenters, and timber, so that the king of Israel might build himself a house fit to live in.

Chapter VIII

David had hurried forward his military improvements from a conviction that he would soon hear from the Philistines. The time for the payment of his tribute had passed, and he had sent no message, black or white, to Achish, but had merely pressed on with his preparations. Shortly after the departure of the Tyrians a Philistine envoy had appeared with a letter to the king, which Seraiah interpreted for him.

" 'Achish, seren of Gath, greets his son and servant, David, lord of Judah.' "

"What!" exclaimed David.

"So it stands—'lord of Judah—and requires of him three things. First the tribute he swore to pay, second to pull down the wall Millo he built without permission, third to renounce the kingdom of Israel which he took unrighteously.' That is all."

"Is it indeed all?" said David; "three pretty modest requests!—no, Seraiah, you need not prepare writing materials—there is no answer. When the man is fed and rested send him about his business—and let Joab come to me immediately."

There was no mistaking the consequences of such treatment of Achish's missive, and when David heard of a Philistine army marching up the valley of the Sorek his plans were well prepared. In plenty of time he left Jerusalem with his army and marched down to his old fortress at Adullam. From there he was in a position to manœuver for advantageous ground, and for some days the Israelites and the Philistines kept moving about almost within reach of each other, yet never coming to grips. At last news reached the Israelites that their enemies had won the first advantage, and seized Bethlehem. David ground his teeth, but would not agree to the clamor of the hot-heads who cried out for an immediate assault. He moved his men north, and posted double sentinels.

It had been a wearisome day of heavy marching and hard work in which David had taken his share. The water bottles had all been emptied, and the wady on which he had relied for filling them had run dry. When he had made sure that the camp was safe he turned back to the fire round which his officers were sitting and flung himself on the ground with a sigh.

"I suppose they have been watering a flock of sheep higher up the valley," Abishai was saying, and David agreed wearily.

"Well," said Shammah the Harodite, one of the chief officers, "the water in these streams is never anything but muddy, at the best of times—it 's no great loss."

The others laughed ruefully, and Elhanan broke out:

"To my taste the sweetest water in the world is the water I drink in camp after a day of marching, however muddy the stream from which it comes!"

"Ah," said David, who had hardly been listening to the talk, "the sweetest water in the world comes from the well of Bethlehem, by the gate. Is n't it cool and sparkling, Abishai?" He laughed, twisted his cloak around him, and went off to his tent.

The three men who had been talking looked at

each other in silence for a moment. Then Shammah spoke in a low voice:

"How far is it to Bethlehem, Abishai?"

"Not more than six miles."

"We could go there and back in four hours," whispered Elhanan. Abishai stared.

"You 're not thinking of it—" he exclaimed—"the Philistines—"

"*That* for the Philistines," said Shammah, cracking his fingers. "If David wants something I can get him, a set of uncircumcised fish worshipers won't stop me."

"Come on, Abishai," said Elhanan; "you know the ground best." And Abishai shrugged his shoulders and picked up a water bottle.

When David could not sleep he often amused himself with a small harp which took up little space in the baggage and from which he was seldom parted. That night he was striking the strings, almost in a dream, when the tent was pulled open and three men entered. Instantly he was on his feet, and almost as quickly recognized Abishai.

"Is anything the matter?" he asked anxiously.

Shammah stepped forward holding out a water bottle, and said rather sheepishly:

"We 've brought you this, David."

David took the bottle, and gazed at them for an explanation.

"It 's water from the well of Bethlehem," muttered Abishai; and Elhanan, seeing the king still look bewildered, finished the story:

"You said you wanted some, so we fetched it."

For a moment there was silence; then the blood rushed into David's face and he drew a deep breath.

"You broke through the Philistines' camp to bring me this water! What should I have done if they had killed you! This is not water that you have brought me, but your own blood. Shall I drink the blood of men who went in jeopardy for me? The blood belongs to Yahweh, and to Yahweh will I pour it out!"

He raised his arms and eyes and then dashed the water on the ground. Shammah and Elhanan as they left the tent felt that their gift had formed part of some wonderful sacrificial ceremony; they did not quite understand what the king had meant, but that made the honor he had done them the more overwhelming. As Abishai came behind them they heard him muttering:

"I would n't have gone for it if I 'd known he was going to throw it on the ground. . . ."

Chapter IX

The next day David caught the Philistines at a disadvantage and forced them to give battle. Just before they began the attack one of David's old followers told him that the Philistines had brought their gods into the fight, and that would, of course, be a great help to them.

"I wish," he added, "we could have brought Yahweh with us."

"What do you mean?" asked David, curiously, "do you mean the sacred lot?"

"Oh, no," answered the man, "I meant Yahweh himself. They used to take him into battle in the old days, but once the Philistines captured him, and since then he 's been kept in Philistia."

David had no time to pursue the subject, but he determined that later on he would question Gad or Nathan about it—they would be sure to know.

The battle was a complete victory for the Israelites. The gods of the Philistines were seized and the Philistines fled in disorder down to the plain. The one moment of anxiety for the Israelites had been when David, impetuously rushing into the hottest part of the fray, had only been saved by Abishai's help, from the sword of a gigantic Philis-

tine. The Israelite officers, who fully realized the importance of David's safety, implored him to swear a solemn oath never to go into battle again, but David only laughed at them, and said he would see.

The campaign against the Philistines was not yet ended. Again, later in the same year, they marched up the valley of the Sorek, and pitched at its head in the valley of Rephaim. It was then that David carried out against them a tactical scheme which he had long pondered, and which was so daring and novel that he felt obliged to get the support of Yahweh before he dared attempt it.

"Do not attack them from the front," Yahweh said; "make a circuit behind them, and attack them by the mulberry trees. When the spirits of the mulberry trees begin to march, then march too, for then is Yahweh gone forth to smite the Philistines."

The valley of Rephaim lay to the west of Jerusalem, and the mulberry grove was on the enemy's right wing. Yahweh's instructions meant, therefore, that David was to leave Jerusalem secretly, and to wind round south, west, and north so as to cut off the rear of the Philistines. He could obviously not take the whole army in this way—Joab was to be left behind with the bulk of the Israelites, while David, Benaiah, and a picked section of the Philistine guards were to attempt the turning move-

ment. The army was thus divided, David cut off from his base, and Jerusalem but weakly defended by the depleted Joab. The doubts and protests of the old soldiers were only silenced by the fact that the instructions had come direct from Yahweh himself.

At night David, Benaiah, and the guard set off. Under cover of darkness they reached their appointed place behind the unsuspicious Philistines. At dawn Joab was to occupy the enemy by an apparent frontal attack with his archers and slingers; and at dawn the breeze, which comes so often in the East when the day is breaking, began to blow.

"Listen!" whispered David to his followers, who for an hour now had been straining at the leash. "Listen! is not that a sound of spirits in the trees? They are whispering, assembling, stepping eastward! Come! for Yahweh is gone before us!"

This time the rout of the Philistines was overwhelming. For miles the Israelites pursued them northward, and the number that escaped was but a small fraction. But David was not satisfied with the knowledge that there would be no more attacks from his old enemies for many months; he was determined to settle with them once and for all. Now it was his turn to be the invader; and so well

had he prepared for the task he had set himself that after a few campaigns Gath was in his hands, and the Philistines—themselves almost incredulous of the completeness of their downfall—reduced to pay tribute to the king of Israel. Nor did they ever again become a menace to their Hebrew victors.

Chapter X

David had fastened a row of captured Philistine gods to the wall of his house and was looking at them curiously. Seeing Nathan pass by, he remembered what the soldier had told him of the old custom of taking Yahweh into battle, and called to the prophet to come over to him.

"They can't do any harm now, can they?" he asked, pointing to his prisoners; and Nathan agreed this was impossible.

"Why should n't we take Yahweh into battle, as the Philistines take Dagon?" continued David; "some one told me we used to in former days; why don't we now? *Have* we a Yahweh like that?"

"Not like *that*," replied Nathan, scornfully.

"Well," said David, "I 've been thinking about it, and it seems to me it 's a pity we can't take our

god into battle with us, as other nations do. You see, we who are the people of Yahweh make war for him, and he fights for us. The whole business of war belongs to him, and is *set apart,* as Samuel used to say, like everything else connected with him. Even the men who fight are *set apart,* and may not touch many things, or go into their women while a campaign lasts. We make sacrifices to Yahweh before a battle, and if he leads us, it would be better if we had him there in the midst of us and could see his face."

"Ah," said Nathan, slowly, looking at David with a thoughtful air as if wondering whether he would say all that was in his mind, "there is a good deal in what you say. Now, I dare say you 've heard that Yahweh led our race out of Egypt and showed us the way through the desert to this land we live in now. In those days the children of Israel *had* Yahweh in the midst of them—but not in *that* kind of shape—" sneering at the images on the wall.

"How then?" asked David, eagerly.

"Well, it is the Ark—a chest—that is the Presence of Yahweh." Nathan lowered his voice and looked uneasy. He was decidedly uncomfortable at talking about such things, but certainly the king ought to know.

"The Ark?" David pondered for some time. He, too, felt the insecurity of the topic, and his heart was beating with unpleasant violence; still, he was determined to probe the question as far as possible. "I have an idea the Philistines had it—they took it from us—I don't remember exactly how. . . ."

"Yes," said Nathan, gloomily. "The Israelites took the Ark into battle, but the Philistines defeated them and seized it. That was years ago, when Samuel was a child. The Philistines took it to Ashdod and Yahweh brought illness and death to the men of Ashdod; then they took him to Gath and he brought death to the Gittites. At last they took him out of Philistia and placed him in Kiriath-Jearim, for that was outside their own territory, yet the Canaanites who lived there paid them tribute, and would not let the Israelites take the Ark back."

"You see," exclaimed David, "how important it would be to us. Even when our enemies had it prisoner it brought them ruin. . . ."

"I know," replied Nathan, with some hesitation, "but the Presence of Yahweh will bring ruin to any one who approaches it without due precaution —enemy or worshiper—it is *set apart.*"

"Of course. Still, the Presence of Yahweh

should be with the people of Yahweh—in their chief city—here, in Jerusalem. Think, Nathan, what preëminence it will give to the place—the royal city—if it is also the sanctuary of the Ark. All the tribes will unite to come up here in worship, and all will recognize this as the holiest place of all. Perhaps the Tyrian builders could make a house for Yahweh—a glorious house of cedar wood, like the one they are building for me! Would not that be splendid, Nathan? As for these men of Kiriath-Jearim, *they* will not now hold back from me anything I want."

In this David was certainly right. Abinadab, the Canaanite in whose house the Ark had been placed, instantly agreed to deliver it up, and promised to send it away on a new cart. The king ordered a national holiday, and went out to Keriath-Jearim in procession, accompanied by his chief officers, Abiathar the priest, the prophets, and a group of minstrels with harps and timbrels. David walked at the head of them, lost in an enchanting dream. He saw the Ark brought to Jerusalem, a superb and astonishing temple built for it to which all the tribes came streaming up—deserting their own high places, and recognizing that in the city of David alone was Yahweh truly to be found.

"And when my kingdom has spread far and

wide—even beyond Jordan—the heathen, too, will hear of the fame of my temple and come—perhaps from over the Great Sea—to gaze at its outer court, beyond which they must not step."

He woke up with a start, to find himself outside Abinadab's house. A new cart harnessed to two milk-white oxen stood at the door, and on it was a wooden chest. All the people of the town seemed to be standing around, and Abinadab was bowing and touching his head in an ecstasy of salutation.

"Never yet under the yoke, my lord," David heard him say, "and my two sons, Uzzah and Ahio —make your duties to his lordship, boys, make your duties—will lead them down the hill."

Two young, rosy-cheeked youths standing at the oxen's head grinned and bowed sheepishly. David smiled at them, thanked Abinadab for his kindness, and ordered the procession to turn toward Jerusalem and to start.

And now, as they plodded along the rough track, the excited worshipers kept circling around the cart and its holy burden, singing, clapping their hands, prostrating themselves, calling out to the Canaanite youths to be careful, for Yahweh the god of the Israelites was not to be trifled with. Presently they came to a village where the ruts in the track got deeper and more stony. Suddenly the oxen

stumbled, the wheel of the cart jerked up on to a bit of rock, the cart tilted, and the Ark began to slip. A shout went up from the Israelites, and Uzzah, who was on that side, turned his head, and seeing the chest on the edge of the cart quickly pushed it back into safety. A groan burst from the onlookers, and the kaleidoscopic crowd turned to stone.

"What is it?" asked David, coming quickly up with Nathan and Abiathar to see what had happened.

"He touched—he touched the Holy One—he pushed the Ark," cried a hundred voices, pointing at the unfortunate Uzzah, who was standing dazed and white by the cart.

"Touched it! Unhappy wretch," cried Nathan, pulling away the skirt of his dress from contact with the wheel.

"Beware of the anger of Yahweh," exclaimed Abiathar, and Uzzah began to groan and tremble.

Instantly the voices of the Israelites were raised in vindictive yells at the Canaanite, who looked around him for help in vain—at the first cry Ahio had fled to safety.

"Yahweh will strike—why touch the Holy One? —the Ark of Yahweh will slay—the plague will smite him—death will take him—there is no escape from Yahweh."

Uzzah fell to the ground—his knees would not hold him up. The cries of the Israelites redoubled —there was a roaring in his ears—the voice of the terrible Yahweh shouting in his might—and the bow snapped.

"He is dead," said Abiathar raising himself from the fallen body over which he had been stooping. "He should have known better than to lay his hand upon the Ark."

Chapter XI

The servants of the king's household trod lightly that night, for the king was not in an agreeable mood. He was displeased with Yahweh, and, besides, a little frightened. Everything had seemed to be going so well—the triumphal entry of Yahweh escorted by himself into the royal city would have been such a glorious moment—and then suddenly horror, death, failure. He had been stunned by the catastrophe. No one had known what to do with the cart and its fearful load; the villagers and the rejoicing Israelites had fled in terror when it became certain that Uzzah was dead, and it was only after a long time that Abiathar had found a

Gittite named Obed-Edom, who lived in the neighborhood, and was willing to harbor the Ark until its final destination could be decided. David returned gloomily to Jerusalem, and his people spoke to each other in hushed whispers.

But it was not in David's nature to be long downcast. He soon began to see the other side of things, to feel the return swing of the pendulum. After all what did it show but that Yahweh must be treated ceremoniously? If only the proper precautions had been taken nothing would have happened—it was the necessary result of carelessness and inattention. Besides, it showed the terrific strength of the god of Israel, and could in the end only redound to the credit of his worshipers. Next time things should be better managed and then there would be no trouble.

After a time David began to make enquiries as to how things were going with Obed-Edom—whether he and his family were in good health, whether his crops were prospering—and it appeared that all went well. It was evident that there were no more fearful emanations from the Ark, and the time seemed propitious for making another attempt to bring it up to the city. Much more elaborate arrangements were made this time. A tent, with curtains, was pitched in the middle of the

citadel for its reception when it should arrive; David himself put on a loose linen dress that hung straight from his shoulders—a dress such as was worn by the priests—and went down with all his servants to Obed-Edom's house. Instead of a cart and oxen, poles had been brought, and Abiathar instructed four priests to lift the Ark with these, and so to carry it. While it was being raised there was an anxious hush; David, pale with suspense, watched them hoist the poles to their shoulders, steady them, and begin a slow and stately walk up the hill. After six steps, all seemed well, and David, with a sigh of relief turned to Abiathar. The priest nodded, and David sacrificed there by the wayside an ox and a fat sheep. Everything was satisfactory. The country people clamored uproariously as they carried away their share of the sacrifice, the musicians blew on their trumpets, the people shouted, waving green branches and leaping and running. David was soon carried away by the contagious emotion around him. He rushed to the head of the procession as it entered Jerusalem and whirled and bounded in the air in front of the Ark, bowing to the ground, springing up, jumping around it, throwing himself into the fervor of adoration with all his might. As they passed by his own house he looked up. At the window of the room

on the upper story stood Michal, surveying the wild scene with cold contempt. David caught her eye; she flung back her head with a short laugh and disappeared from the window. David's dance was finished.

The Ark was now placed in the tent and two priests were placed on guard outside it. The king again made sacrifices, and all the Israelites who had assembled were summoned to receive from his officers a loaf, a cake of raisins, and a portion of date-wine. Then a long hush came over the excited crowd. David raised his arms, and his clear sweet voice rang over his people with the words of the ancient blessing of Aaron:

The Lord bless thee and keep thee:
The Lord make his face to shine upon thee and be gracious unto thee:
The Lord lift up his countenance upon thee and give thee peace.

It was getting dark. The people moved quietly away and David, tired with his emotions and exertions, climbed slowly up the steps of his house, in the courtyard of which stood his own household. His back had been turned to them while he blessed the people without, and one of the servants ran up to him and kissed his feet.

"Bless us too, O my lord," he cried, and a murmur from the others echoed his wish. David smiled and was raising his hand when through the crowd pressed a woman. It was Michal, her eyes glowing and her cheek flushed; she came quickly up to David, touching her forehead and bending her head as if in greeting, but he saw at once that she was full of irrepressible mockery.

"How glorious was the king of Israel to-day!" she exclaimed in a loud voice; and David stared at her without answering. She lowered her voice and continued:

"Indeed, it well becomes a king to expose himself to the women servants of his house as you have done to-day," and she pointed at his light, loose robe, and laughed contemptuously.

David flushed as much with anger as with shame, and his eyes darkened. "It was to the Lord that I exposed myself, as you call it; and he who chose me to be king instead of your father knows better than you what becomes a king. And you need not fear that the women servants will not hold me in honor."

Forgetting the servants and the blessing they were waiting for, he strode through the courtyard, and hid himself in an inner chamber.

Chapter XII

David wondered how he could ever have thought Michal beautiful. Now that the bloom of early youth had disappeared one could see so plainly that her features were uninteresting and her expression acid. As for her tongue . . . well, it had all been a great mistake, but his eyes were open now, and his relations with her at an end for ever. What were the feelings of the woman, born a princess, torn first from her bridegroom, then from her husband and children, thrust into a hostile household of foreign women, and at last deserted and dishonored, he neither considered nor cared. The whole thought of her was hateful to him, and he dismissed it from his mind.

The pleasantest associations of his domestic life were connected with his children, and in particular his little boys. The two eldest, Amnon and Absalom, were beautiful, strong, intelligent, and full of eager vitality. David was always amused at their quarrels and games, and pleased by their courage and emulation in physical feats; they seemed to him so like what he himself had been as a child, yet so much more lovely, charming, and vigorous, that he felt they would be able to carry out all that

he left unaccomplished, to embark on all he had no time to attempt.

All this, however, only if they grew to be men, and were able to inherit his kingdom. He was constantly haunted by the recollection of how his inheritance had been snatched from Jonathan, and an unreasoning dread lest some one of Saul's house should play the same trick on Amnon. There were still two sons of Saul alive, somewhere on the east of the Jordan, and he had an idea that Merab had some children. Any one of them might easily come forward and claim the kingdom, and if anything untoward should happen to him, what would become of the two little boys?

Meanwhile most of his attention was taken up with affairs of state. Having reduced the Philistines to impotence, he turned to put an end to the incursions of the Edomites, and a little later entered on a war of extermination against Moab. These wars, however, he did not conduct in person; Abishai led the army against Edom, and Benaiah against the Moabites. David himself was fully occupied at the center of affairs, administering justice, levying taxes, sending supplies to those in the field. A series of bad harvests added to his difficulties, and the shortage at last became so great that it amounted to a famine.

In the midst of these harassing conditions news reached him of discontent among the cities of the Gibeonite league. They formed a group of Canaanites with whom the Israelites had made a treaty in the early days of their entry into Palestine, and who ever since had held a privileged position in relation to the Israelites. At this particular moment any trouble from them would be a serious handicap, and it seemed essential to deal with them by diplomacy rather than force.

The first necessity was to discover the cause of the Gibeonites' hostility. It appeared that they were still resenting the action of Saul, toward the end of his reign, in putting to death some of the inhabitants of Beeroth, one of the cities of the league. David thought long and deeply over this, and at last determined to try his old trick of making his difficulties solve each other.

In a solemn assembly of his chief officers Abiathar was instructed to consult Yahweh as to the cause of the increasing scarcity.

"Upon Saul and upon his house rests the guilt of blood," answered the oracle, "because he put to death the Gibeonites." The treaty with the Gibeonite league had, of course, been made before Yahweh, and it was inevitable that his anger should be aroused when it was violated. At the advice of

his council David invited a deputation of Gibeonites to come up to Jerusalem that he might hear what they had to say. When they arrived he received them with great graciousness, and at once made them feel that they might with impunity ask for what they wanted.

"What shall I do for you?" asked the king, before all his councilors. "How can I atone for what has been done wrong, so that you may once more be on friendly terms with the people of Israel?"

"My lord," answered the Gibeonite spokesman, "there is no question of bloodmoney between us and Saul or his house; neither is it for us who are Canaanites to execute a blood revenge against the Israelites. . . ." He paused; he had evidently not said all that was in his mind.

"True," said David, leaning forward, and speaking with solemn emphasis. "True; it is for their king to execute judgment upon them. Do you therefore tell me what it is you want, and I will do it for you."

The Gibeonites glanced at each other and his companions nodded gently to their spokesman. "Give us those that remain of the house of Saul and we will impale them in Gibeon at the high place —the place of sacrifice to Yahweh." They could not believe that the king would grant them such a

request, but had come up obstinately determined to accept nothing else; surprise and gratification struggled for supremacy in their hearts when David rose in his place and answered them gravely:

"In the name of Yahweh it shall be as you wish."

It was now incumbent upon David to find out who of Saul's descendants were alive. A man named Ziba, who had formerly been a servant of Saul, and was now a prosperous trader, sending caravans between the east and west banks of the Jordan, was the most likely man to be informed. He happened to be in Jerusalem at that time and David sent for him and questioned him narrowly. From him it appeared that two of Saul's sons, Armoni and Meribaal, still survived, that Merab, Saul's eldest daughter, had five sons, and Jonathan one son, who was, however, a helpless cripple.

"It happened at the time of the battle of Gilboa," explained Ziba; "he was only a child then, and in the flight of the royal household from the Philistines his nurse dropped him and broke the bones of his feet. He can't stand properly . . . He is on the other side of the Jordan at Lodebar, in the house of Machir."

"A cripple!" thought David. "There will be nothing to fear from him. And did n't I swear

to Jonathan that I would be good to his sons? Seven are enough to give to the Gibeonites."

So when Joab went out to find the sons of Saul and Merab, and deliver them to the men of Gibeon, nothing was said about the younger Meribaal, the son of Jonathan. David would wait to see how the rains fell—if they were plentiful Yahweh and the Gibeonites would be appeased and Meribaal would be in no danger.

It was toward the end of April that the seven victims were executed in Gibeon, and the rains were expected in October. Before that time a strange tale reached the ears of David. Rizpah, Saul's concubine, the mother of Armoni and Meribaal, had gone up to the high place, laid sackcloth on the rock, and devoted herself to keeping watch over the dead bodies that hung there. The birds by day and the beasts by night had no chance of desecrating and mutilating them, no chance of devouring the flesh and blood and thus depriving the princes of the shadowy bodies without which they would be unable to pass their phantom lives in the realm of Sheol. David's feelings were stirred by the tale; and when at last a fine rainfall came and made the next harvest secure he sent for the bones that had been so faithfully guarded, and, with the bodies of Saul and Jonathan, which he

fetched from Jabesh Gilead, buried them with royal honors in the family burial place at Zela. Then he ordered Ziba to bring Meribaal to him.

Sitting in the court of his new house, with his servants around him, David awaited the approach of Jonathan's son. Those old, old days—how long ago they seemed—to what a remote past—infinitely remote from the actual present—they seemed to belong! Yet the memory of Jonathan—of his devotion, his transparent disinterestedness, his passion, his romance, stirred David's pulses and made his throat swell. Through the crowd of suitors Ziba appeared, helping along an awkward figure who clutched his arms and whose head hung down. At David's seat he flung himself to the ground, his face in the dust.

"Meribaal," said David; and could say no more.

Meribaal looked up. His face was white and drawn; he looked older and more haggard than Jonathan had ever looked, and his lips were trembling; but he had Jonathan's serene, gentle eyes, and an echo of his endearing voice.

"Behold your servant." The words were so low David could hardly hear them.

"Do not be afraid," he said kindly. "I mean you no harm; I will be kind to you for the sake of Jonathan, your father. I loved him."

Meribaal touched his forehead, his lips, and his breast, and bent down again to kiss the king's feet.

"What am I that the king should look upon such a dead dog?" Again it was the moving echo of Jonathan's voice.

"Ziba," said David, "I give to Meribaal all the land that belonged to Saul, and I give you charge over the land to manage it and make over the produce to him. And besides that, Meribaal, you shall have a place at my table with my own sons; and you shall not want for anything any more."

PART II

BATHSHEBA

Chapter I

NEWS had reached David of the death of Nahash, king of the Ammonites. Nahash had fought with Saul, and in the days of David's struggles with him had taken the side of David and befriended him. Hanun, the son of Nahash, now succeeded his father, and David determined to send him an embassy of congratulation. It was the first of these customary embassies that he had been in a position to send, and he was a good deal elated at the thought of it, and a little anxious lest it should not go off well. Among those he selected to go to Ammon was Elihu, now an old man, but still strong enough to attempt the journey, and of a suitably venerable character and appearance to play the almost sacred part of an ambassador. Elihu was delighted at the compliment and told David that he was very wise to choose one envoy

at least who was accustomed to courts and knew how to behave there.

Poor Elihu! His knowledge of courts stood him in little stead among the barbarous Ammonites, and his dignity received a shock from which neither it nor he ever recovered.

Rumors of an insult to his ambassadors reached David some days before he heard exact and definite news. He was already impatient and annoyed when a messenger from Elihu arrived, with torn clothes, and all the appearance of mourning.

"What has happened?" cried David.

"Great wrong to the Israelites," answered the man woefully. "When the king's ambassador arrived at Rabbah, Hanun's counselors would not believe that they had come to do honor to Ammon, but declared they were spies sent to find out the weaknesses of the city. So Hanun took them and —it is a shame even to speak of such things—shaved off half their beards, and cut off the skirts of their clothes up to their waists. Then he sent them away. They are at Jericho now and have sent me to tell the king, for they are ashamed to come into his presence."

For a long time after this painful tale there was a silence. David's officers were too much shocked to know what to say; David himself was too indig-

nant to be able to speak coherently. At last he made an effort.

"Go back to Jericho and speak kindly to Elihu and the others from me. Tell them to wait at Jericho till their beards have grown and then to return home. They are not to grieve, for the blame is not theirs, and I will fully avenge them on Hanun and the Ammonites. . . . Now, Joab, Abishai, and Benaiah, how many men can we put into the field? and how soon will they be ready?"

David's determination to teach the Ammonites a lesson they would not forget was only strengthened when Elihu returned to Jerusalem, and he saw how much shaken and cast down the old man was. He heard that Hanun was making great alliances with the Syrians, and with the kings of Zobah, Maacah, and Tob, but he cared nothing for this and continued his own preparations.

By the time the rainy season was over he was ready, and sent out Joab and Abishai to march on Rabbah, the capital of the Ammonites. It was not long before Joab returned. He had defeated the Syrians and the other allied troops, and driven the Ammonites back to their fortifications, and he was now returning to Jerusalem to get siege machines, to be taken back and used on Rabbah in the following year. Before the rains began David

himself took the army out for a second campaign against Hadadezer, king of Zobah, who had strengthened himself by an alliance with the Syrians of Damascus, and this turned out the most glorious of all his campaigns. The enemy was completely defeated. David put garrisons in Damascus and levied a yearly tribute from it, while from Hadadezer he took enormous plunder, including a set of golden shields and a hundred chariot horses—the first the Israelites had possessed. The mere news of these triumphs brought him the submission of another of the local princes, Toi, king of Hamath, who sent his son Hadoram to do homage to David, and to make him a propitiatory offering of gold, silver, and bronze vessels. With all these trophies, with his additional provinces, and his far-spread renown, David returned to Jerusalem well pleased. He determined to leave the siege of Rabbah in the spring to Joab and himself to rest upon his laurels.

Chapter II

It was evening. The long rays of the sun no longer flung themselves down like fierce javelins, but seemed to caress the hillsides with golden warmth. The long shadows had lost the purple

splendor of noon, and taken on an almost transparent look. A gentle breeze had carried off the last of the midday heat and dust; it was the time for pleasure or repose.

David had just finished his siesta. The thought of returning to his eternal discussion of ways and means with Seraiah was distasteful to him. He almost wished he was with Joab, besieging Rabbah —after all he was still vigorous. He pulled up his sleeve and looked ruefully at the muscles of his arm. If it came to a wrestling bout he could yet show these young men there was something left of him. He stretched his arms like an awakening tiger —what should he do?—go into the harem? No, he had had enough of those women—there was not one of them who could give him a tenth of the pleasure he had had in Abigail—or even Ahinoam. Were there no young beauties left? When Abishai came back from Ammon he would make him search some out.

Suddenly an idea occurred to him. Why should he wait? He would find some one for himself, and the search at any rate would amuse him. And he would begin at once. The hour before sunset was the time when the women were free of the upper parts of the houses, and no men were allowed on the roofs lest they should see something not meant

for them. But David, the king, could do what he liked and no one would dare to interfere with him.

David's new house was almost at the top of the eastern ridge. Around it and below it on three sides were clustered houses, occupied chiefly by the families of his officers and their wives. He stepped gently out on to the roof and looked around.

Almost directly underneath him was a large house with a group of oleanders at one side. Moving to and fro on the roof of this house were a group of girls laughing and chattering over their work, which consisted in pouring water into a wide, shallow copper vessel, and placing around it various linen strips, small pots, and flasks of oil. He saw at a glance that it was in preparation for their mistress' bath, and for a moment he hesitated. Had he not better go in? The next instant he laughed at himself, crouched down behind some trailing vines, and watched.

It was not long before the woman herself came out. From his position he could not see her face, and her long trailing garments concealed everything but the generic grace of the Oriental woman. Somehow—he could not tell why—David was in a fever of impatience; something in her movements made him long to see more, and when she began a dis-

cussion with her women as to the merits of the unguents they had brought out, smelling one, rubbing another on the palm of her hand, and finally sending for yet a third, he hardly knew how to contain himself. But all thought of leaving the roof had vanished.

At last she disrobed. In a flash, it seemed to him, the bands that fastened back her veil and her hair were off, and her heavy black locks were tumbling down her white back. She stepped into the bath, and the girls began washing, rubbing, splashing, turning her around, lifting up her limbs, pushing her this way and that. . . . Then began the drying, anointing, and perfuming; finally her hair was arranged, her dress replaced, and in another moment she had gone.

David drew a long breath. He had been gazing with such intentness that his eyes ached, and as he crept down from the roof he put his hand over them. But that would not keep out the image of what he had seen. . . . Who was she? How could he have her? His mind held no other thoughts than these.

By the time he had got down to the lower rooms he had a plan ready, and called out to the doorkeeper, who came running to see what he wanted.

"Tell me," said David, as lightly as he could, "whose is that big house below—the one with the oleanders?"

"It must be Uriah's that my lord is speaking of—Uriah the Hittite."

"Oh yes," answered David; "I could not remember—of course, Uriah the Hittite. Send Seraiah to me."

When Seraiah came, David asked him for the names of the officers at Rabbah under Joab, and when Uriah's name was mentioned he stopped him.

"Uriah—is n't he the brother of Ahimelech—the two Hittites who joined me in the early days of Adullam?"

Seraiah assented.

"More than ten years ago—nearer fifteen, I suppose. He was quite a boy then. What does his household consist of?"

"He has only one wife—Bathsheba, the daughter of Eliam—they say she is a beauty—I believe he has not had her long."

"Ah well, let me know directly any news comes from Joab. Good night, Seraiah." David turned away, but looked back and called after him.

"Eliam—is n't he one of my officers? Whose son is he?"

"Yes, he 's an officer—the son of Ahitophel."

All night David saw the white shoulders and black hair gleaming before him. He slept, but Bathsheba was in his dreams and he woke suddenly, with a beating heart, trembling violently. Till sunrise he lay wondering what her face was like—Seraiah had said she was a beauty—suppose she was not—ah, but suppose her face was as lovely as her body—it must be—he must have her so—the most beautiful creature in the world.

When the sun rose the business of the day began, and it was a long time before David was free. Directly it was possible he went to the women's apartments and found an old servant who had come to him with Abigail and had always been devoted to him.

"Miriam," he said hastily and softly, "you know the house of Uriah the Hittite—you are to fetch me his wife, Bathsheba, to-night—after dark. Bring her here and see that no one interrupts." Suddenly terror overwhelmed him lest something should go wrong—some one find out—ruin everything. He caught the old woman's arms and glared at her, his face almost touching hers.

"Take care,"—his voice was hoarse and fierce—"no one is to know—if you betray me you 'll wish you 'd never been born."

Miriam smiled and patted him on the arm.

"There, there," she said, "you shall have her, don't be afraid." She nodded and showed her toothless gums, then pattered away down the corridor, well pleased with her commission.

By the time darkness had come David was in a fever of impatience. Everything was prepared. Cushions covered the ground, a savory meal, smuggled in by Miriam, was spread out, and the room was illuminated by several small earthenware lamps. David heaped the cushions together, looked at the flask of wine, sat down, got up again, examined the lamps to make sure there was enough oil in them, and began to walk up and down the room, almost beside himself. Had Miriam after all played him false? Had Bathsheba refused to come? What could it be? Why were they so late? How could he bear this suspense another moment. . . .

He heard footsteps outside; they paused at his room; the door opened noiselessly and a woman's figure glided into the room. She was closely veiled, and as David came eagerly forward she bowed her head, touched her forehead, and was motionless. "Bathsheba!" exclaimed David. She raised her head and seemed to wait. "Come and sit down." He led her to the cushions, and pressed her down; then, his hands trembling with eagerness, he un-

wound the veil. Her beauty almost took away his breath—clear, fine features, an exquisite complexion, smooth as a pomegranate and gently flushed, dark, deep eyes, and lips that quivered between drooping and smiling—he gazed and gazed, his breath coming quicker and quicker.

At last the inclination to smile conquered, the dark eyes sparkled, and she laughed outright. David laughed too, caught her in his arms, and then held her away to look again.

"Ah," he said, rapturously, "one dreams and dreams of what it will be, and then when one sees. . . . But you must eat something. What a delicious meal we are going to have—look—our hands meet in the dish—let me put this delicate morsel into your mouth—you must have some of this wine—is n't it sweet?—now I am going to be your slave and wash your fingers—how white they are, and how happy the water is, to be kissing them!"

Bathsheba hardly spoke. She lay back lazily in his arms, enjoying the tender, trembling caresses of his strong hands. At last the meal was over; David flung himself on the ground and pressed his lips upon her small white feet.

"Oh, Bathsheba, Bathsheba . . . speak to me. I want to hear your lovely voice. . . ."

"Lord," she answered, pressing her hands together.

"Oh no, no . . . not that . . . don't let that ever come between us. . . ."

"David, then."

"No, no . . . you know better than that . . . say it . . . you must."

"Love." Her voice was very low, but David heard.

For weeks Bathsheba came across to him nearly every night. Her beauty and her charm never palled; she intoxicated him and robbed him of any inclination to think of what was coming. But one night Miriam appeared alone, and when David demanded an explanation delivered one, with pursed lips and shaking head:

"Well, what can you expect? It 's a child."

Chapter III

David was staggered. The idea of such a catastrophe had never occurred to him—in fact, since he had taken up with Bathsheba very few ideas of any sort had occurred to him. He was entirely absorbed by her, dreaming all day of the coming

raptures of the evening, flinging himself in her presence into a world of pleasure and passion, sleeping through the short hot night in an unruffled, bottomless pool of unconsciousness. From this dizzy circle he was torn rudely enough by Miriam's announcement. It took him some time to realize it and all its implications, and a day passed before he pulled himself together sufficiently to send for Miriam and give her a message for Bathsheba.

"Tell her to be careful—*very* careful—to let no one know. And tell her that I have sent for Uriah."

Miriam goggled at him for a moment, and then gave an oily little chuckle.

"You 're a cunning one! Once Uriah 's been to her—such a long time as he 's been parted from his little wife—who 's to think any harm or say a word? He, he! . . ." and the old woman went off hugging herself.

David had indeed sent a swift messenger to Joab with an order to be delivered immediately: *"Send me Uriah the Hittite,"* and until he appeared David was on the rack. Suppose anything happened to delay Uriah—suppose he was ill—suppose Joab had an attack of insubordination and would not send him. . . . He ground his teeth—if Joab

should *dare* he would be sorry for it, though that would not mend matters now. He was in an agony —a fever, and his mind seemed to revolve uselessly in that narrow chamber of hateful ideas, impotent and suffering. He did not see Bathsheba, and indeed pushed her from his thoughts; as regards his own future action he did not look beyond the one idea of sending Uriah in to his wife, and for the rest sank into misery, pursued by the terrifying fears of some impediment to Uriah's safe arrival.

At last, one evening, an hour before sunset, the doorkeeper announced that Uriah the Hittite had arrived from the camp before Rabbah, and understood that the king wished to see him.

"Yes," said David; "show him in," and though his heart beat quickly the load upon him seemed to have lightened.

Uriah entered and made his obeisance, and David looked at him as if he had never seen him before. He was hot and dusty after his hurried journey, his hair sticking to his forehead, his lips dry and cracking. He was not a tall man—not handsome, though neither was he short or ugly—just an ordinary, insignificant looking fellow, David thought, with a thin, straggly beard. It suddenly occurred to him that if he had been a fine, striking man he

would not have wished to carry out his intentions; as it was he put his fingers into his own thick golden beard and felt pleased.

"Well, Uriah," he said, smiling, "and how is Joab? . . . and the army? How are things going on?"

"Joab and the army are well, my lord," answered the Hittite. "Rabbah is certainly a formidable fortress to attack, yet we make no doubt we shall have it in the end."

"Why, what are the fortifications like? Simply walls, are they not?"

"Walls, yes, but much more massive than anything in this part of the country—I 've heard they are on the model of some Assyrian defenses—and then there is a wide ditch in front of the wall with water from the Jabbok in it. I believe Joab's plan is to get command of the water above the city so as to drain the ditch—he says it is useless to attack the town directly."

"So I should suppose from what you tell me. I am most interested in your account of the situation, and don't doubt that what I have heard of your good services and desert is quite true. But I won't keep you now—you are tired from your journey—go down to your house and wash your feet and rest—and come to see me in the morning."

Uriah bowed and turned to go, his heart swelling with delight at the king's graciousness. To add to his satisfaction, he heard David say to a servant: "Don't forget to take a dish from my table to Uriah the Hittite to-night"—the king was indeed bent on honoring him!

His next action, however, was far enough from pleasing the king.

"You have been very quick with that meat," said David to the servant who had taken the dish he was sending to Uriah; "you can't have had time to go down to the Hittite's house and back."

"No, my lord," answered the man, "but Uriah had not gone to his house. He is in the court with the others, and will sleep to-night at the king's threshold."

David looked at him in horror. Just when he was beginning to feel safe—what *could* Uriah be thinking of? Of course, men on military service were not supposed to go in to their wives, but—no one would have known—and now everything was unsettled again and he must beat out some new method of extrication.

He spent a sleepless night void of counsel, or of anything but rage against the malice of events. In the morning when Uriah came to him as had been arranged he found him in a very different mood

from the evening. He was irritable and sarcastic, and whatever Uriah said served only to increase the pungency of his remarks.

"Well," said David at last, unable to keep off the topic that obsessed him, though he knew it was useless and felt it was rash, "so you slept up here last night. I thought after your journey and long absence you would be sure to want to go to . . . your own house."

Uriah flushed faintly and looked at the ground.

"Yes . . . I did go down for a moment—but as you know we in the camp are all *set apart*—no, no, while the Ark and Israel and Judah and Joab and the rest are out there in the tents I can't be eating and drinking and enjoying myself with my wife. . . ."

"Of course not." Uriah wondered at the bitterness of his voice. "Well, come and eat at my table to-night, and you shall go back to camp with a message for Joab to-morrow morning."

Uriah's answer had given him a suggestion—he would have one more attempt before giving up all hope.

That night, then, Uriah ate with the king. He began to wonder if David was ill—so changeable he had been—first so gracious, then all over prickles, and to-night as jovial as possible again

—perhaps a shade too jovial. Certainly when one looked closely he was thinner in the face, more haggard looking than usual, and his eyes seemed to have sunk into his head and to gleam feverishly. He was evidently excited, too, though he seemed quite friendly again, and kept pressing Uriah to more and more of his own special wine. At first Uriah hung back and protested; but good manners and then the rich flavor prevailed over his scruples, and soon the whole world swayed in a golden mist.

"Now, Jonadab," said David to one of his nephews, laughing, "help the poor fellow down to his house and let his wife take care of him."

Jonadab took the Hittite's arm and dragged him out of the room, but came back a moment after, smiling ruefully and declaring he could not get Uriah out of the court—his one idea had been to refuse to go home—he must stay there till he awoke in the morning.

The feast did not last long after this episode. David, black and impatient, dismissed them all, and was soon in deep conference with Miriam. He must see Bathsheba that very night; Miriam must persuade her that Uriah was disposed of—that all was safe—and that the king insisted on her coming immediately.

Miriam's arts were quite capable of all this, and it was not long before Bathsheba stood before him. Directly he saw her he forgot everything else.

"Ah, my beauty!" he cried, stroking her head and her shoulder. "What years it seems since I 've seen you—how have I lived without you? . . ." but she pushed him away.

"Hush, David; we 've so much to speak about. He has n't been near me—Miriam says to-night he 's drunk—what are we to do?"

David dropped her arm.

"I don't know—I can't think—are you *sure?*—*quite* sure?"

"Yes, quite; and so is Miriam." She looked at him; suddenly she gave a faint scream and fell on her knees, clutching his robe.

"You 're not going to give me up?—to leave me?—you 're not going to pretend it 's not you?—you know what they 'll do when they find out—it 's stoning—think—all this"—she pulled away her dress and showed her white, throbbing breast—"this that you called so beautiful—that you said you loved—that you caressed and kissed so often—bruised, bleeding—ah—" she shuddered, and began to sob. "And the child too will be killed—*your* child, David—oh, don't let them—save me, save me, don't leave me to such dreadful things. . . ."

He took her in his arms and laid her on the cushions, stroking her hair and soothing her.

"Hush, hush . . . don't cry so . . . don't cry . . . it 'll hurt you . . . hush, hush, my little girl . . . of course I won't leave you . . . of course you 're safe . . . oh, hush, my darling."

Presently her sobs grew less and she began to kiss his hands, and caress him feebly. "That 's right, my beauty; you must n't cry so—you must be brave, and help me to think of what we can do."

She sighed wearily.

"I don't know—why could n't he come up to me?—it would have been so easy—but he 's always tiresome—always doing the most annoying thing. If only he was killed out there at Rabbah—heaps of people are—but, of course, *he* won't be, just because it would make things so simple."

David gave a half-hearted laugh.

"Yes—it certainly *would* be convenient if something were to happen to him."

"But it won't—you 'll see." She too gave half a smile through her tears.

"It might," David persisted, and then stopped suddenly. They looked at each other as if by a common impulse; neither spoke; Bathsheba's eyes were dry and David's hard. All at once he got up and walked across the room.

"It 's time you went back," he said when he .urned, and his voice was cold and remote.

Bathsheba's hysterics were over. She twisted her veil on and called Miriam. At the door David said "Good night" and kissed her; on her hot forehead she felt it like a brand of ice.

Before sunrise David was closeted with Seraiah, concocting a despatch for Joab. It was not long, yet it took a long time to produce, and Seraiah looked gray and weary when he came out with it and called for Uriah.

"You are to go as fast as you can—don't waste an hour—Joab must have it as soon as possible. No, you need not go in to greet the king, he is busy. He told me to tell you he wishes you good speed."

Chapter IV

During the weeks that followed there were no more meetings between David and Bathsheba. David sent her word by Miriam that it was wiser so, and she acquiesced without protest; but the wish for safety was not the only thing that kept them apart just then, during the long days in which they both waited for news from Rabbah.

At last the expected messenger arrived and David said he would see him alone. The man was a sharp, weasel-faced fellow who had never been so near the king before. He noticed that during nearly the whole of the interview David kept his eyes on the ground, but when he did look up his eyes were as piercing as a sword.

"Joab sends news of a fight we have had with the men of Rabbah. His main operations are above the city, on the waterworks, but from time to time he makes demonstrations on the town itself so that they may not discover his real aim. This fight was just one of these demonstrations, only it developed into something a little more serious, and Joab thinks you should hear of it."

"Well?" David was playing with the corner of a rug and hardly appeared to be listening.

"We attacked early in the morning and the men of Rabbah came out against us in force. Joab sent reinforcements to the Israelites with orders to push back the enemy at any cost. The Ammonites began to retire, and about a hundred of our men pursued them right up to the wall, which was strongly manned, and before they could get back there were some rather heavy losses."

The color leapt into David's cheeks and his eyes were suddenly fixed on the messenger's face.

"What is the meaning of such a manœuver? What were these men doing up against the wall—did they not know they would be shot at from behind the ramparts?"

The man certainly felt uneasy, but he went on with his message.

"Most of the Israelites came back in good time—there must have been some confusion in the orders given to the others. I was to tell you that about twenty men were killed—among them Uriah the Hittite."

There was such a long pause that he felt the king must have forgotten his presence, and began to wonder how he would get out of the room; but at last he had his answer.

"Return to Joab and say this to him: 'Do not be discouraged by this reverse: a town cannot be taken without losing men: go on with the siege and take the city.'"

David's voice was slow and weak; his face, which had been white, was gray. The messenger wondered if he was ill, but he dared not speak a word, bowed to the ground, and left the room. The news of the disaster was published all over Jerusalem before he left it.

It was now the end of August. After a good deal of secret consultation with Miriam and Bath-

sheba it was agreed that as the child was to be born in March it would on the whole give the least opportunity for scandal if Bathsheba were brought into the harem immediately after her seven days of mourning. The child could then pass as a seven-months' child, and malicious gossip would at any rate be provided with an official answer.

Certainly there was plenty of gossip to deal with. The hasty marriage, the rapid discovery of Bathsheba's condition, soon aroused suspicion. There were plenty of stories going about Jerusalem to promote its growth. Some one had seen David coming down from the roof at a time when he had no business there; another had seen a young woman the same height as Bathsheba leaving Uriah's house several times after dark; one or two had noticed how anxious David had been for Uriah to go down to his house the last time he was in Jerusalem, though of course he had no right to go to his wife. Possibly Miriam may have whispered something to a few of her cronies, and Seraiah may have told his wife what was in David's letter to Joab. When it was all put together it made a pretty story, and by the time the baby was born Jerusalem could talk of nothing else but poor Uriah and that infamous woman, Bathsheba. For David there were many excuses. His own wives were an uninteresting set

—Ahinoam faded, Michal a scold, Naomi too young and inexperienced; doubtless, too, he had been deceived and led on by Bathsheba, who had taken advantage of his well-known kindness of heart. A few took a less philanthropic view of the case, and among these was Nathan the Prophet.

David, of course, was completely ignorant of the current rumors. He had almost succeeded in forgetting the unpleasant events of the previous summer, and was as proud as possible of the little boy Bathsheba had given him. The child was not as robust as could have been wished, and one morning the women protested something had gone really wrong with him, and set up all the stir and bustle which they seem to think necessary at such times and which drives the men to flight. On that very morning Nathan asked to see the king.

"How is the baby?" asked David, coming hurriedly into Bathsheba's room.

"Hush—he 's asleep—I think he 's much better."

David sighed with relief. "I knew it was all nonsense. I ought not to have let Nathan frighten me."

"What do you mean? What is all nonsense, and how could Nathan frighten you?"

"I 've just had a terrible scene with him. He came in with some long-winded story about a rich

man and a poor man and a lamb, and when I said it was a disgraceful story and the offender should be severely punished he said I was the man."

"*You!* What did he mean by that?"

"Oh, I don't know. . . . He said I had killed Uriah—which is quite untrue—and taken his wife —which I had a perfect right to do—and that I had despised Yahweh."

"And what did you say?"

"I saw it was no use arguing with him, so I said I had sinned against the Lord. Then he was kind enough to say that Yahweh would take away the sin from me so that *I* should not die, but that the child would."

"David! Did you let him say that? Do you think he knows? How can you let people talk like that to you—but every one says you're too good-natured and this is what it leads to . . . oh, my poor darling . . ." and she hung over the baby in an agony.

That night the child was worse again and the whole palace was in a turmoil. For seven days he hung between life and death, and during all that time David lay in an inner room imploring Yahweh to remove the sin, pouring dust on his head and fasting. His counselors, as far as they dared, begged him to be reasonable—to sit up, to

eat—but he made no answer, and would not even raise his head. On the seventh day as he lay in that mist of horror he felt that a terrible hush had fallen upon the palace. Then he noticed that the men in his room were whispering—he looked up and saw that they were in a little group together staring at him. He sat up and asked dully: "Is the child dead?"

"He is dead," answered one of them, and they all watched the king anxiously. David got up with difficulty.

"Bring me water and oil and prepare a meal for me. Since Yahweh has not heard my prayers and the baby is dead I need fast no more. The child will go to Sheol, and I, when my days on earth are over, shall go to him there."

It was fortunate for David that about a month later he was called off to Rabbah by Joab. The long siege was coming to a successful close, and Joab suggested that the king should come and strike the final blow, so that the honor of taking the town should be his. He marched off with a new contingent of men and in a few weeks Rabbah surrendered. The work of dealing with the captured inhabitants and plundering the city did not take long, and David soon returned to Jerusalem with a gold crown set with precious stones which had

belonged to Milcom, the god of the Ammonites. Bathsheba, radiant with pride and hope, came out to meet him, and at the sight of her the cloud that had hung over David so long was lifted from his forehead. In the beginning of the following year Bathsheba had a beautiful boy; he was called Solomon.

PART III

ABSALOM

Chapter I

WHEN Solomon was eight years old he was given into the charge of Nathan, to learn whatever it was thought desirable for him to know. By this time the palace buildings had increased in number and size, and the luxury of the arrangements surpassed anything that had been dreamt of in the early days in Jerusalem. To begin with, the king's own family was of such dimensions that its accomodation demanded much space; the grown-up sons each had his own establishment, while the unmarried daughters lived in the greatly enlarged and improved harem. The seclusion of the women, though nothing like what it afterward became, was even then a mark of superior rank and refinement, and brothers and sisters by the same father and different mothers were, in the ordinary way, kept apart from each other. Indeed they were hardly

looked upon as related, and marriages between them were sanctioned and not uncommon.

The king's eldest son, Amnon, occupied a special position among the princes. He was the acknowledged heir, and always favored by David, though some thought that secretly he was fondest of Absalom. Absalom and Tamar were the son and daughter of Maacah, herself the daughter of the king of Geshur, a principality to the north of Israel. They were devoted to each other, and for a long time Absalom would not leave the king's palace because he did not wish to be separated from Tamar; when at last he was persuaded that he ought to, he still contrived to see his sister almost as frequently as before, in Maacah's room. Maacah herself had been a celebrated beauty in her youth, and her two children inherited her looks. Absalom was very like David—he had the same golden-red hair, which grew even more luxuriantly than his father's. So heavy was it that every year he cut it short, and every year it grew again below his shoulders.

Besides the king's sons and daughters there had to be rooms and houses for his other relations. Many of his brothers and sisters had children, the younger of whom had been brought up in the palace, though of course, Joab, Abishai, and some

other nephews of his own age had long had their own houses. Amnon and Absalom had both their favorite cousins—Amnon's was Jonadab, the son of Shimei, an elder brother of David, and Absalom's was Amasa, the son of Abigail, a younger sister.

Then, on the outer edge of the royal circle, were the advisers, officers, and attendants of the royal household. These had been added to periodically until they now formed a small town in themselves. Among the new servants whom David found in his later years he could not do without, were the musicians. Since he had had more time for leisure he had more and more devoted himself to music—had made new musical instruments, invented new songs, and gathered around him a choice group of men and women singers and performers. In these days the royal feasts were elaborate, artistic ceremonials, instead of the mere orgies of food and drink which were all that Saul had known or imagined.

With these increasing complexities in his way of living David tended more and more to be absorbed in the external ritual of royalty, and to turn away from his old dreams and meditations. His affection for his sons still remained and was expressed chiefly by praise and indulgence—his daughters hardly affected his scheme of things—and Bath-

sheba retained an influence over him which she had perhaps never yet exerted to the uttermost.

It happened that Amnon had not been to see his father for several days, and at last David sent for Jonadab to ask the cause of it. David thought Jonadab was rather sly and did not trust him or like him; but as Amnon was so fond of him he concealed his own feelings—or thought he did. Perhaps he did not conceal them from Jonadab.

"Amnon is ill," was his reply to David's enquiries; "it is not much—a little fever—it irritates him to be crossed, and that is apt to make the fever worse—I am sure a visit from the king would be the very thing for him."

So David set off for Amnon's house, and found him on his bed, looking, as Jonadab had said, flushed and restless. He tossed about while his father talked, and at last David rose.

"Is there anything you want, my son, before I go?" he asked. Amnon hesitated.

"No—yes, I want my sister Tamar to come and make some cakes for me. She makes them better than any one else and I believe I could eat them. But she must come and make them here, or I shall be sure somebody else made them, and they won't be good. . . ."

David shook his head and smiled.

"What foolish ideas you have—well, as you 're ill I 'll tell Maacah to send her across."

He glanced over his shoulder as he left the room and whispered to Jonadab, who was standing outside:

"He really is n't well—such flushed cheeks and bright eyes—I 've never seen him like that before. If he is n't better by the evening, send me word."

Jonadab bowed low and made no answer.

That afternoon there was such an outcry in the women's apartments that David nearly sent to ask what the matter was. He smiled to himself, however, and decided that it was wiser to say nothing about it. If it was anything important, no doubt he would hear about it all in good time.

He did indeed hear about it.

The wails and lamentations seemed to increase rather than diminish, and suddenly, without the customary request for permission, Absalom burst into the room. His face was crimson with passion, he was panting violently, and stood there, at first apparently unable to speak.

"Absalom!" cried David, in alarm, "what is it? Why do you rush in like that? Speak!"

Absalom at last found his voice, but only to stammer incoherently:

"Tamar!" he said, and then, "That villain Ammon—O God, the villain! . . ."

David turned pale.

"Be quiet, Absalom," he said, "be quiet; and tell me what has happened."

Absalom turned on his father suddenly, with a concentrated fierceness.

"Yes," he said, "I 'll tell you, and you shall say whether that devil should live another day—another hour. Tamar—" he swallowed convulsively—"Tamar went to him by your orders. He sent every one out, and asked her to come to him. 'No,' said she; 'ask the king, and he will give me to you properly as a wife.' But he would n't listen—and took her by force. Then—the black-hearted scoundrel—he told her he hated her, and turned her out and bolted the door. And she came back alone through the streets, crying and tearing her dress. . . . Oh my poor, pretty Tamar!—but I will see you righted."

Absalom himself was crying, the tears streaming down his cheeks, but David said nothing and stared at him. Presently Absalom's rage overcame his grief and he caught hold of David.

"What are you going to do?" he cried between his teeth.

"It 's too terrible," said David faintly. "How

does he dare commit such wickedness? If he were not my eldest son he should. . . ."

Absalom shook his arm and cried out again:

"What are you going to do?"

"It is a great sin—I am very, very angry with him—I shall certainly not see him until he is sorry for what he has done. . . ."

Absalom looked at him; then with a groan, half rage and half despair, let go his arm and rushed out of the room as wildly as he had come in.

Chapter II

Yet what was David to do? The usual thing in a similar case was for the offender to pay a sum of money to the girl's father, which in this case was clearly absurd. It is true that such an arrangement did not always appease the male relations—often, like Absalom, they became excited and took an exaggerated view of the affair, in which case bloodshed was apt to follow. But it was just such frays and feuds that David saw to be fatal to the progress of the country, and he aimed, in all his system of administration, at reducing them to the minimum. Why should he encourage Absalom's

foolish excitement? Besides, Amnon was the eldest. . . . In short, it seemed to him better to do nothing. Amnon must be told his father was seriously displeased. Absalom must calm down and become more reasonable. In time the whole thing would blow over.

Two years passed, and it seemed as if David was right. There had been no outbreak, no recriminations, and Amnon and Absalom were apparently on good terms. It was late in the month of May and the harvest was in full swing. The warm days, not yet too hot, and the delicious nights made it a season for pleasure parties, and the young people of the palace were constantly devising expeditions and festivities.

One day Absalom came to David, full of excited gaiety, and bursting with a request.

"I am going to have my sheep-shearing feast at Baal-Nazor in a day or two—will you come, father, and all your household?"

David smiled.

"All my household—why, Absalom, you would be ruined—it would take all your harvest of this year to give us a feast."

"But you can't come without your people, and I so want you to come."

David shook his head.

"No, no, my son, don't press me. I 'm too old for these gaieties—besides, you young people would not enjoy yourselves so much if I were there in your way. Go and have your sheep-shearing feast without me."

Absalom looked down and hesitated.

"Well, then," he said, looking up again, "let Amnon come with us instead."

"Amnon?" said David sharply. "What do you want him for?"

"If I cannot have the king to honor my feast the next best would be his eldest son," Absalom explained.

"Well, ask him," answered David; and Absalom kissed his hand and laughed with delight.

"Yes!" he exclaimed, "we will have Amnon and Adonijah, and Shephatiah and Ithream and all their friends—you will not let us take little Solomon, I suppose? I will ride over to-night and see that all is prepared, and then—to-morrow if possible—we will have our feast!"

David smiled at him and laid his hand on the golden head. He felt a great gush of feeling whenever he looked at Absalom, for whom he had a peculiar and intimate love. Amnon was the eldest, and had always held a privileged position, but it was Absalom who was the darling of his

heart. At times like these, when the young man was eager and intent for some trifling scheme on which he was set, when his eyes danced and his mouth broke into irresistible smiles, David felt as if his own youth had come back—his own youth shining in a golden aureole of princely pomp and luxury, which made a delicious contrast to the hard and dangerous days of the old reality.

The next morning was as brilliant and glittering as could have been wished. Before the sun had actually risen the pleasure makers were astir, and soon a noisy, laughing troop of young men were assembling outside the palace. The grooms brought out mules, harnessed in bright colors and hung over with bells; the runners, those who went before persons of high rank to prepare the way, had girded themselves up for the twelve-mile run; other servants were loading a few donkeys with extra delicacies to be used at the feast. Then, in twos and threes, the princes and their companions appeared —about twenty young men, the eldest not twenty-six, the youngest just eighteen. Solomon, a chubby boy of ten, had escaped from Nathan and was jumping in and out of the concourse, his vain longing to join in the sport drowned for the moment in his excitement at the assembly. All this David watched from the roof with a tender enjoyment of

their pleasure. Suddenly, with a thrill at which he smiled himself, he saw Absalom jump on to his mule, wave his hand, and call to the others.

In a moment they were up, the whole gaily colored crowd in movement, accompanied by the clattering of hoofs, the jingling of bells, the laughter of young men. Amnon was obviously the gayest and noisiest of them all. He rode in front with Absalom on one side and Amasa on the other, and kept turning round, shouting jokes and snatches of song to the rest, flinging himself about in his saddle, evidently dominated completely by hilarity and excitement. David saw the gay cavalcade wind down the hill to the valley of the Kedron—then they turned north, toward Bethel, near which place were Absalom's estates, and disappeared behind the turn of the road.

The long shadows of evening were beginning to creep across the narrow streets, and David, his siesta over, was sitting in one of the lower rooms. He did not expect the princes back till after dark, and indeed would not have been surprised if they had sent a messenger to say that with his permission they would spend the night at Baal-Nazor. All at once he heard a scuffle at the door—the doorkeeper and some would-be intruder were evidently in dispute.

"Go and see what it is, Jonadab," said David, for Jonadab, for some reason best known to himself, had not gone with the others. Before he could get across the room the doorkeeper had been worsted and a man rushed in, his clothes torn, his head covered with dust, his eyes bloodshot and staring. Never was a more obvious messenger of evil. David leapt to his feet, and the man flung himself to the ground, and in answer to the king's frenzied cry, gasped out:

"Absalom has killed all the king's sons and there is not one of them left."

The wail of despair that filled the hall was echoed from the courtyard and from the streets of the city. The king flung himself on the ground, the bystanders tore their clothes—only Jonadab remained cool and collected. He waited for a few moments, then went over to where the king lay and sat down beside him. He spoke in a calm, assured voice, and presently David raised himself and listened.

"Let not the king suppose that they have killed all the princes, for only Amnon is dead. Absalom has been planning this since Tamar was forced."

"What do you say?" asked David, feebly.

"Let not the king take it so to heart," answered the quiet voice. "Let him not think that all the

princes are dead, for only Amnon is dead and his brothers are safe."

Jonadab spoke as if he knew—did he know? Was it true what he said? In another moment a man was pushed up to David—the man who kept watch on the tower.

"My lord, men are coming down the road from Beth-Horon—the road over the western hills."

"You see, my lord," explained Jonadab, "these men will be the princes—it is as I said."

In another moment, before the dazed king had fully realized what they were saying, the young men rushed into the room. Breathless, frightened, travel-stained, a sorry contrast to the pleasure seekers of the morning, they too flung themselves on the ground and wept.

At last David spoke—but so mournfully that some of those who had known him longest felt they hardly recognized his voice.

"But Absalom? Where is Absalom? Did not some one say *he* had done it? I do not see him here. . . . Where is he?"

There was a pause.

"He went north," murmured Adonijah.

"He has gone to Geshur," said Jonadab decidedly; "he has gone to his grandfather Talmai, at Geshur."

Chapter III

How had Jonadab known all this? He who had been the confident of Amnon, who, as some whispered, had suggested the ruse that had ended in the ruin of Absalom's sister, now appeared as the confidant of Absalom, and had perhaps suggested the revenge that had ended in Amnon's death. David's anguish over the business was so great that he would not probe these dark mysteries, but he made no attempt to conceal the fact that Jonadab's face was hateful to him, and the young man soon found it no longer worth his while to live in Jerusalem. He went to Bethlehem, where his father had some of the family land in cultivation.

The blow had been a terrible one to David. It was a long time before he could even pretend to resume his usual habits, and all who were about him said that he was dreadfully aged. Strangely enough, he recovered more quickly from the death of Amnon than from the exile of Absalom. Death was so definite, so unalterable, so plainly the end of the chapter, that David's incurable good sense and instinct for making the best of things prevented any dwelling on the loss, or useless repining. But with Absalom it was different. The problem of

his attitude to this adored son was an open wound which pained him continuously. Should he send for him back?—should he forgive him?—or had his offense been too great for that? Amnon, though not yet actually anointed, had surely something of the sacred character of a king—he was, moreover, Absalom's own brother, and his father's son. On the other hand, Absalom had had considerable provocation, and had doubtless been urged on by designing and unscrupulous men. . . . What should he do? He could not tell—every action seemed alike wretched and wrong, and in the helplessness of his oscillations he did nothing at all.

Joab watched his uncle with a gruff, obtuse sympathy, and once or twice asked him why he did n't send for the young man back.

"You 're getting old, David, and you 're fond of the boy, are n't you?"

"Yes . . . yes . . . of course I am. But I 'm not as old as all that, Joab. After all, I 'm not sixty yet."

"Yes, but you 've had a hard life; it 's told on you more than on me, and I 'm certain you 're hankering after Absalom."

But David talked of something else, and remained undecided. At last Joab felt sure the thing was preying on David's mind. He had no particular

affection for his cousin, but he thought it was all great nonsense to keep him in exile just for killing Amnon, and planned out a scheme of his own to induce the king to forgive him.

A few weeks afterward, when David was sitting in judgment, a woman, dressed in the coarse brown woolen clothes of a mourner, with dust on her head, came and prostrated herself before him, crying out:

"Help, O king!"

"What is the matter?" asked David; and she rose and explained her case.

"I am a woman of Tekoa, and I am a widow. I had two sons, and as they were at work in the field they quarreled and fought, and one of them killed the other. Now, then, all the family are against me, for they say it is their duty, and, besides, the custom of the tribes, to kill the one who remains, for the life of the brother he slew. And they have appointed an avenger of blood who came to me and asked me to deliver my only surviving son, that they may destroy him and leave me without an heir, and my dead husband with no one to carry on his name. So then, as I was afraid of them, I said to myself, 'I will go to the king, and perhaps he will help me.' "

This was just the sort of case that David liked.

It was the substitution of central authority for private feuds and revenges, and he was convinced that such a substitution was essential for the power and prosperity of the country. He smiled encouragingly at the petitioner.

"Quite right," he said; "you can go home and I will give orders for the matter to be seen to."

The woman bowed and spread out her hands.

"If there is any sin in sparing him who has shed blood," said she, deprecatingly, "may it fall on me and my house, and may the king and his throne be guiltless."

David thought she had not understood him and spoke more explicitly.

"If any one says anything to you, bring him to me, and he shall not touch you or your son."

She was apparently not satisfied, but bowed again, touching the ground with her lips.

"Will the king swear by Yahweh that the avenger of blood shall not destroy any more?"

"I swear it by the life of Yahweh," said David, expecting the woman to thank him and retire. To his amazement she caught hold of his robes and spoke more eagerly than before.

"May I say a word to the king?"

David thought she had already said a good many, but he smiled and said: "Speak on."

He was still more surprised when she stood up, pushed back her veil, and looked intently at him. Now that she was standing upright he was struck by the firmness and dignity of her carriage; her keen gray eyes and the lines on her face gave her a look of intelligence and decision which he had not expected from her somewhat rambling tale, and when she spoke her voice had lost its slightly whining tone, and rang out clear and strong.

"Why then do you on your side act against the people of God? By giving this judgment you show yourself guilty, for you yourself have not brought home your own son who is banished."

She paused, her eyes still fixed on his, and then continued: "Water spilt on the ground cannot be gathered up; we must all die and it will then be too late to do or receive kindness."

Another pause, and she spoke again.

"Yahweh will surely give long life and prosperity to him who brings back the outcast from worshiping strange gods in a strange land, to Yahweh's own country where alone he can be worshiped."

David leant back, his mind in a whirl, his emotions in a strange confusion. So *that* was what her tale had meant—the fratricide, the blood feud, the royal intervention had all been a fable, and the whole scene was merely a trap to get him to forgive

Absalom and bring him back. But why should this woman of Tekoa intervene in the affair? Why should she trudge fifteen miles to mix herself in matters with which she had so little concern? He looked at her, pulling his beard and considering. Then he leant forward.

"I beg you to answer my questions truly—do not conceal anything from me."

"Let the king speak."

"Is it Joab who sent you to me with this story?"

The woman smiled and her tension seemed to relax.

"It is indeed impossible to hide anything from the king. It *was* Joab who charged me with it and told me what I was to say—his object was that you should see it all from a different point of view. But you are too wise—you have the wisdom of an angel of God, and understand everything on the earth. . . ."

"Well, Joab," said David, that evening, "I have seen your wise woman and heard her tale—you can go and bring Absalom back to Jerusalem."

Joab sensibly did not allow time for the king to change his mind; he went immediately to Geshur and returned with the prince. It was as well he did so, for by the time they got back David had had

another revulsion of feeling and refused to let his son come into his presence. So things lasted for another two years, until at last Absalom induced Joab to intercede for him again, and again at Joab's suggestion David yielded to his own wishes. This time the pardon was complete and official. Absalom entered the room where his father sat in state, prostrated himself, and kissed the ground; the king raised him to his feet, put his arms round him, and kissed him on both cheeks.

Chapter IV

Four years passed, and with the advance of old age David felt an increasing peacefulness and serenity. The perils and struggles of his youth, the wars and violences of his middle age had faded into the background. The size of his empire, his wealth, his importance among Syrian rulers were little short of marvelous. Absalom was at home and forgiven—Absalom was his heir and would continue his conquests and develop his improvements. Everything seemed to have turned out as fortunately as possible, and if his own vigor and

energy were not all that they had once been, the young man was there with the vigor and energy of youth.

One evening, in the pleasant hour before sunset, David sat in his hall conversing with two of his counselors, Hushai the Archite, and Ahitophel the Gilonite. Ahitophel was the grandfather of Bathsheba, and in high repute at the court as a man of knowledge and cunning. While they were finishing their discussion of some point of administration, two younger men were lounging on the cushions at the king's feet, carrying on in a low tone a conversation of their own. They were Solomon, a handsome youth of nineteen, and Meribaal, the son of Jonathan, and suddenly Solomon called out, as if to settle the question in dispute:

"Ittai will know—let 's ask him—Ittai! come here! we want to ask you something."

Ittai, a large, heavily built man, evidently one of the king's guards, came clanking across the room to hear the question.

"You come from Gath, don't you, Ittai? Well, Meribaal says some one told him the Philistines had iron swords long before the Israelites had them —is that true?"

"Oh yes, quite true," said Ittai; "why, I remem-

ber when I was a child the Hebrews had no smiths at all, and used to bring their plowshares down to us to get them sharpened."

"But if they had iron plowshares, why should n't they have swords?" asked Meribaal. Ittai shook his head; he could n't tell.

"Well, I suppose they could n't get enough iron for both, and wanted the plowshares most," suggested Solomon. "Besides, I suppose the Philistine smiths—and you say there were no Israelite smiths —would n't make swords for them."

"But some Israelites won them from the Philistines in battle," said Meribaal, with a suppressed sigh. "I 'm sure I 've heard them say David did, in a wonderful battle against a whole army. . . ."

David, hearing his name, began to listen.

"Yes," said Solomon eagerly, "I 've heard something about it too—there was something about a giant—do you know about it, Ittai?"

"Of course I do," said Ittai, "seeing that the giant, whose name was Goliath, came from the very town I came from. His father's name was Raph, and Raph and his four sons were giants, and terrors to the Hebrews."

Ittai noticed that David was listening and turned to him for confirmation.

"Were n't Raph and his sons terrors to the Hebrews, David?"

"Well, Ittai, the Hebrews killed them all in battle, did n't they?"

Ittai threw back his great head and laughed, but Solomon shook his arm impatiently.

"But tell me about Goliath, and how he was killed."

"Ah, that must have been a fine fight. There was David—a little slip of a thing, younger than you, Solomon, with nothing but his sling and shepherd's staff—and across the stream the giant all in bronze armor. 'Am I dog,' cried out the giant, 'that you come out against me with sticks and stones? Come to me,' he cried, 'and I will give your flesh to the birds of the air and the beasts of the field.' 'You come against me,' answered David, quick as light, 'with a sword and a spear and a javelin, but I come in the name of Yahweh of Hosts whom you have defied.' And before Goliath could say another word he slung a stone at him and killed him dead!"

"And took his iron sword!" cried Solomon, jumping up, "and cut his head off with it. Did n't you, Father? How splendid! Did n't you?"

"Of course he did!" answered Ittai, before the king could speak. David smiled.

"Why don't you tell Meribaal about Michmash and his father's great doings?" he asked, and Ittai looked sulky. He did not like to talk of the Philistines being defeated by any Hebrew except David.

At this moment the doorkeeper announced that Absalom was without and asked permission to see the king, and in another moment the prince entered. Absalom was now a big, handsome man of thirty-five. His hair had lost something of the golden tint it had in his youth, but it was still silky and luxuriant and was dressed with scrupulous care. His clothes, too, were rich and evidently well cared for, and he wore several gold ornaments. His expression had entirely altered. The sparkle had gone out of his eyes—was there a shifty look in its place?—and the smile had left his lips. His beard, beautifully curled and scented, was too small to hide the heaviness of the lower part of his face, and his full lips and contracted eyebrows gave him a look that was at once sensual and sullen.

As he entered the room he glanced quickly at Ahitophel, who was standing behind the king's chair. The councilor made an almost imperceptible movement with his hand and his head, and Absalom smiled faintly. By this time he had reached David and made a gesture as if to pros-

trate himself, but his father caught his hand and prevented him.

"Well, Absalom?" The king looked up at him affectionately.

"You are kind to let me break in upon your council," said Absalom, in a low voice. "Have you time to listen to a request?"

"Yes, yes, certainly." David smiled with pleasure at the thought of being able to do something that his son wanted. "You are not interrupting—our council is over—what is it you want?"

"I want leave to go to Hebron to pay a vow to Yahweh. When I was in Geshur I vowed that if the Lord brought me back to Jerusalem I would make a sacrifice to him at Hebron, and that is the vow I wish to pay."

"By all means go," said David, whose heart had stood still a moment at the mention of Absalom's time of exile. "When do you think of going?"

"To-morrow, if you have no objection."

"No, no . . . shall you take the little girl?" Absalom had brought back a wife from Geshur, but his three sons had died in infancy and his household consisted only of a little daughter who had inherited the family beauty and was called Tamar.

"Yes, I want to take her with me. She will be

quite comfortable in the chariot, and the horses will make the journey a short one."

"Well. . . ." David looked up and raised his hand to bless Absalom, who bowed his head. The king's hand rested on it—to Absalom it seemed an age—and then with a slight tremor in his voice David spoke:

"Go in peace."

And with those words in his ear, and hatred, treachery, and violence in his heart, Absalom left his father's presence forever.

When he had gone Solomon stretched himself lazily, and muttered:

"Is he going to Hebron for the sake of using his wonderful chariot, and exercising his horses and runners?"

"Hush, Solomon—don't speak of your brother like that."

"Or does he want the people of Judah to take him for the king? . . ."

"What nonsense!—you ought not to say such things—ought he, Ahitophel?"

But Ahitophel was not there. He had slipped out unperceived in the darkness.

Chapter V

It was not long before David's awakening. One night the sound of the trumpet was heard in the towns and villages of Israel, and the announcement went out, *"Absalom is king in Hebron."* The news reached Jerusalem before sunrise, and Abishai went immediately to the king to break it to him. The very fact of Absalom's proclamation stunned David, to such an extent that he sat bereft of speech or thought; Abishai had no idea how to rouse him, and could only think of sending in to him messenger after messenger with the news as it arrived—first of the different tribes that threw in their lot with Absalom—then of the two hundred men who had secretly gone to Hebron from Jerusalem—then of Absalom's march northward—obviously toward Jerusalem, the capital.

This finally penetrated to David's mind and convinced him that he must act. Joab, the only man whose advice he would have taken at such a juncture, was in southern Syria bringing to reason a district that had been giving trouble; Ahitophel was at his own city of Giloh, and the enemy was marching on Jerusalem.

"We must fly, Abishai," cried David, starting

suddenly from his stupor. "We must fly at once; otherwise we shall none of us escape from Absalom. . . ."

Abishai stared in amazement. Jerusalem was a fortified town, particularly difficult to assault, a messenger would soon bring Joab and the army to their assistance—he could not understand what David could be thinking of.

But the king was trembling violently, impatient and irritated at Abishai's hesitation.

"Make haste, make haste and let us get away or he will overtake us and the whole town will be put to the sword. . . ."

Abishai shrugged his shoulders and turned to go out and make arrangements for the flight. As he was leaving the room David called him back with nervous impetuosity.

"We can't take all the women—it 's impossible—they would delay us too much—but whatever happens don't leave Bathsheba behind—and tell Nathan, that he may bring Solomon."

Abishai nodded and hurried away.

It was obvious that if they were to fly they must fly at once, and Abishai allowed little time to the household for their preparations. Instructions had to be sent to Benaiah and Ittai, who commanded the Philistine guard, Nathan had to be told to get

ready, Abiathar and Zadok, the high priests, had to be warned of the king's departure, messengers had to be sent to Joab summoning him back at once. There was no time to collect stores, they must trust to the friendliness of the country through which they passed—if that failed them the guard could perhaps get some food by force, but it was no use thinking about that. Ten of the royal concubines, Abishai decided, must be left behind. When all his dispositions were made he fetched David, who silently put himself at the head of the dismal procession, and with bowed head and trembling limbs set out.

And so a second time the son of Jesse went into exile. The first time he had been alone, unknown, unprotected, yet with a high spirit, superb self-confidence, and an almost gay sense of adventure. Now he had a faithful bodyguard, many friends around him, the prestige of a king, but went out miserable and despairing, dazed by the unexpectedness and cruelty of the blow that had fallen on him. If there was anything in his consciousness besides the agony of Absalom's treachery, it was the humiliation of Judah's infidelity. Affection and pride alike were wounded, and the egotism from which they both sprang writhed in torture.

They went down the hill, up the valley of the

Kedron as far as the last house. Then Abishai stopped, and turned to David.

"Of course you mean to cross the Jordan. We must pass the Kedron here and go over the hill by the high place. The guard had better come first and see that all is secure."

David acquiesced in silence, and he and the household waited by the wayside for the soldiers to go past.

He turned and looked back at Jerusalem. So different a town from the one he had seized in his strength and his pride . . . the fine stone houses shone in the sun, and climbed high up the hill, while northward of the city, almost directly before him, was the green hill of Moriah, crowned by the farm buildings of some Jebusite. He gazed with an unthinking eye, his mind absorbed by other thoughts, yet the picture made an unfading impression, and in after years often started clearly into his imagination.

Presently he turned his head, and looked at the men who were streaming by. At the end of the column came one or two officers, and among them Ittai the Gittite. The sight of his face was the first thing that had roused David since the terrible exodus had begun. He stopped him with a motion of his finger, and beckoned him to come near.

"Why do you come with us?" he said in a weak voice, and Ittai bent his head to make sure he heard. "Go back to Jerusalem and stay with *the king* . . . you are a stranger, an exile from your own home . . . you came but yesterday, and to-day shall I make you go no one knows where with me? . . . Return, and take your companions with you, and may Yahweh show you mercy and truth. . . ."

Ittai had been grumbling and growling throughout these words of David, and when the king stopped he broke out in a great passion.

"As Yahweh lives, and as the king lives, wherever the king is, whether dead or alive, there will I be!" And with a gesture rare among the Philistines he bent down and kissed his master's feet. A faint smile rose to David's lips; he put his hand on Ittai's head and said:

"Go then—pass over the brook."

The mere fact of having spoken to some one had been good for David, and Ittai's loyalty and disinterestedness had been balm to him. More aware of his surroundings, he looked to see who were following the soldiers; it was a group of priests headed by Abiathar and Zadok, the high priests, bearing in their midst the Ark of God. The high priests made a sign to the bearers to put it down

by the side of the road, to enable the remaining refugees from Jerusalem to cross the brook before them. While they waited David looked at them, and at last spoke:

"Why have you brought the Ark out of the city?"

The priests looked at him with amazement, and Abiathar answered:

"The king and his soldiers are going to battle —should not Yahweh go with them to give them victory?"

There was a momentary silence, and at last David spoke with a firmness that made Abishai sigh with relief in spite of the alarming nature of the order:

"Carry the Ark back. For if Yahweh is on my side he will take me back too, in safety, to Jerusalem and the place where he dwells. But if he no longer cares for me why should I venture to take the Ark with me? Let Yahweh do as he wishes."

The two high priests stared at each other doubtfully, and Zadok asked:

"Are we all to return to Jerusalem, also?"

"Yes, yes," answered the king with a sigh; "return in peace. . . ."

At that moment one of the priests stepped for-

ward and made his obeisance; David signed to him to speak, and he began eagerly:

"I am Ahimaaz, the son of Zadok, and here is Jonathan, the son of Abiathar. We are young men, fast runners. If we return to the city we could bring news to the king of how things go there. . . ."

"So you could; thank you, my—" David had begun to say "my son," but he swallowed the word and groaned. "Thank you. We will wait at the fords of the wilderness till we hear from you."

"Now, David," called Abishai, "they are all over —we are waiting for you."

The king turned down to cross the brook and the priests lifted the Ark and turned again up the hill toward Jerusalem. As David began the ascent of the Mount of Olives a wave of despair rushed over him. He stooped down, took off his sandals, and throwing his cloak over his head burst into a flood of tears. The people in front, hearing the lamentations, broke out in sympathy, and thus mourning and wailing they went up the hill.

It was noon when they reached the summit— the high place, which had formerely been the sanctuary of Nob and had been destroyed by Saul because of the succor Ahimelech, the high priest, had given to David. The heat of the day and the

exhaustion of some of the fugitives made Abishai decide on a halt, and while they rested he attempted to provide some refreshment for David and the women. They had not been there long when a group of men were seen approaching from the north, and in a moment Hushai the Archite, his clothes torn and dust on his head, ran forward and fell at David's feet.

"This is terrible news, my lord," he panted. "I heard as I came along that Ahitophel has joined the rebellion—he made a great sacrifice as a coronation feast at Giloh and then set out for Hebron. No doubt he has been in the plot, counseling Absalom, for months."

David ground his teeth.

"May Yahweh turn his counsel to folly. . . ."

"You are going across the Jordan, I suppose," went on Hushai, "and will make a stand there. I have brought a few men with me, and that will be some help if we are pursued before Joab returns."

But David's instincts for diplomacy were now awake again and he shook his head.

"If you come with me you will only be an additional encumbrance—your men are not numerous enough to be of any real use, and we are already short of food and stores. **No.** ***Your*** **business is to go back to Jerusalem."**

"Go back to Jerusalem?" echoed Hushai.

"Yes; tell Absalom you are on his side—he will take you into his counsel, and you will be able to frustrate Ahitophel's advice."

"I might do something. . . ." Hushai pondered.

"I 'm sure you might. Besides, Abiathar and Zadok have also gone back. You can let them have any news that it is important for me to know and they will send it on by their sons. In this way I shall still have both a tongue and eyes in Jerusalem."

"You are right," said Hushai, getting up. "It is clearly the most useful thing I can do. . . . Well, may Yahweh preserve you and bring you home in triumph."

And now it was time to resume the journey, and while Hushai went west the king set off down the eastern slope of the hill, into the wilderness of Judea that led down to the Jordan. They had hardly started down when hoofs were heard clattering after them, and turning round they saw Ziba, the servant of Meribaal, hurrying after them, leading two heavily laden asses. The king stopped and asked him what he was doing.

Ziba made his salutations with great humility, and answered:

"The asses are for the king's household to ride on—I have also brought some bread and fruit, and a skin of wine in case any are faint in crossing the wilderness."

"And where is Meribaal?" asked the king, half wondering whether the very welcome refreshment came from him.

"Meribaal?" answered Ziba, with an almost imperceptible sneer. "Meribaal has remained in Jerusalem, for he thinks that he will now recover his father's kingdom."

David flushed darkly. So this was Meribaal's gratitude for all the kindness that had been shown him! Let him see how Absalom would behave—let him recover his father's kingdom if he could! Then glancing at Ziba, who was bowing before him, he thought, "Ziba will expect something for his presents . . ." and an idea flashed upon him.

"You bring food and asses just when they are wanted," he said in a gracious voice, "and since Meribaal has turned traitor you shall have all that belongs to him—land, houses, and stores—it is yours from henceforward."

Ziba flung himself on the ground, crying:

"I do obeisance—may I find favor in my lord the king's sight," mumbling the king's feet with his

lips and rubbing his forehead in the dust. Even David could not help feeling a little disgusted at his servility, and one of his men whispered to another:

"And now the faithful Ziba returns to Jerusalem to play the same trick on Absalom."

The journey across the wilderness was a painful one, but thanks to the asses which were ridden in turn by the women and children, and the wine which stimulated the most exhausted, they got through it without disaster. At last they came in sight of Bahurim, a village on the edge of the desert, and about four miles from the Jordan. The sinking spirits of the travelers began to revive, for they were now near the night's resting place—it would be impossible to cross the river before morning, and indeed David did not intend to attempt it till they had had news from Jerusalem.

The village of Bahurim lay in the cleft of a ravine, and as they tramped down the road, wild and jagged rocks rose alongside the track. Suddenly David's attention was called by a fierce shout above him; he raised his eyes, and a strange figure stood before him. It was a very tall, thin man—almost seven feet high, and thin to the stage of emaciation; he was completely naked, and his

scanty white hair and beard streamed wildly in the wind; his right arm was raised and a long thin finger pointed menacingly at the king.

David, and Abishai who was walking beside him, stopped in amazement and stared at this apparition. Immediately he began to pour forth, in a voice hoarse with fury and rage, a torrent of imprecations:

"Begone, begone, thou man of blood and man of Belial! Now will Yahweh be revenged for all the blood of the house of Saul which thou hast spilt, whose kingdom thou hast seized! I, Shimei, son of Gera, of the tribe of Benjamin, curse thee in the name of Yahweh! Yahweh hath delivered thy kingdom into the hand of Absalom thy son; behold! thou art taken in thy own mischief, because thou art a man of blood!"

By this time Abishai had recovered himself, and seizing his sword turned eagerly to David for instructions. David was standing quite silent, his eyes fixed on Shimei, a wretched expression on his face. At last Abishai pulled his sleeve and said:

"Why should this dead dog curse the king? Let me go over and take off his head."

But David shook his head.

"No, no, Abishai, let him curse. If Yahweh said to him *curse David,* why should we question it? Even my own son is seeking my life—how

much more may a Benjamite? Let him alone, and let him curse, for Yahweh has told him to."

He sighed and began the march again. Shimei caught up a stone and threw it at David with a vindictive yell; and as the Israelites passed along the ravine he leapt beside them from rock to rock, throwing stones and dust, and screaming curses on the king. At last they outdistanced him, and glancing back, Abishai saw the long thin figure still leaping and waving his arms, though his voice no longer reached the ears of his enemy.

Chapter VI

That night and the following morning David stayed on the west bank of the Jordan. Abishai was beginning to get very nervous—he saw no point whatever in delaying to put the broad river between them and their foes—but he had no influence with the king, who was set on waiting for news from Jerusalem.

The news came shortly after noon, and was brought by Ahimaaz and Jonathan. They had been quite successful in getting into touch with Hushai, and a plan had been made by which they

could continue regularly bringing messages to the king from the city. It had been agreed that it would be best for the young men not to be seen going in and out of Jerusalem, so they were to hide by the spring Enrogel, to the southeast of the town, where the valley of Hinnom joins the valley of Kedron. Hushai would send his slave girl down from time to time with any information it seemed necessary to send to David.

Their present news was on the whole satisfactory. Hushai had managed to get into Absalom's confidence. There had been a great council at which both Ahitophel and Hushai had spoken. Ahitophel had urged an immediate attack on David before he had time to collect an army; Hushai had advocated a more thorough policy. Absalom was to wait till he had gathered all Israel around him—"from Dan to Beersheba—as the sand that is by the sea is numbered—" then they were to fall suddenly on David and of him and his men not one would be left. Luckily Hushai's eloquence was successful, and Absalom had decided to wait before pursuing David. But Hushai strongly recommended David to cross the Jordan at once, lest after all Absalom should change his mind and Ahitophel prevail.

Ahimaaz had another piece of news which he tactfully kept for Abishai's private ear. In the

evening the people of Jerusalem had seen a tent spread on the roof of David's house; presently Absalom had appeared, and in the face of every one had gone in to his father's concubines. This had naturally caused a good deal of talk. It was admitted that there was now no hope of reconciling the father and son, and that Absalom was claiming his rights as the actual king, and many whispered that the step had been taken on Ahitophel's advice.

Abishai shrugged his shoulders. He did not attach much importance one way or the other to such matters, and frankly admitted that questions of policy were beyond him. He was fully occupied with the urgent necessity of getting the fugitives over the Jordan before nightfall, and by the most strenuous efforts this was achieved.

The next day they set off northward for Mahanaim, the former capital of Ishbaal. David complained bitterly to Abishai, as they went, that it was his own tribe of Judah that was playing him false, and that he was obliged to turn to the Gileadites for help in his adversity.

"The men of Hebron are angry, no doubt, that *their* city is no longer the chief one, and all the tribes of the South are jealous of the Israelites."

Abishai shook his head, and said it was a shame, but his thoughts were occupied with wondering how

soon they could expect to effect a junction with Joab.

The next day they were joined again by Ahimaaz and Jonathan. The two young men had had a narrow escape, for as they were leaving their hiding place they had been seen by a boy who reported it to Absalom, and a body of scouts had been sent after them. When they reached Bahurim the pursuers were hot on their trail, and they only escaped by taking refuge in a well in the courtyard of one of the inhabitants. Absalom's men actually came to the woman of the house and asked if she had seen them, and she answered yes, they had passed half an hour ago, and would be across the Jordan before they could be stopped. This had discouraged the soldiers, who had gone back to Jerusalem, while Ahimaaz and Jonathan continued their journey in safety.

David listened to the tale of adventure with an interest he could hardly give to the report of Ahitophel's suicide and Amasa's appointment as commander in chief. The story took him back to his youth, and all day he walked as it were in a trance, dreaming of the old days of outlawry, peril, and happiness. For surely, after all, those had been his happiest years, though he had not known it at the time. . . . *Then* he had been always dreaming

of the time when he would be king—now that he *was* the king he was the most miserable man in the kingdom.

After this adventure Ahimaaz and Jonathan did not return to Jerusalem, but went on with the king. They did not think it would be safe to go back; besides, it was no longer necessary, for Absalom and Amasa would not be long before they took their army across the Jordan, and a conflict could not now be avoided. That night Abishai had a message from Joab to say that he was going direct to Mahanaim and would meet them there, and on the following evening the foot-sore king and his companions found themselves in at any rate temporary safety behind the fortified walls of the chief town of Gilead.

Chapter VII

Directly the news got abroad of David's arrival at Mahanaim food and stores began pouring in from the neighboring country. Among those who thus showed their loyalty was Shobi, the brother of Hanum, who had been made governor of Ammon after the defeat and deposition of his brother. His fidelity was a great ground of satisfaction to David, proving as it did the pacification of the Ammonites,

and his own wisdom in selecting Shobi as governor. Many chieftains sent in part of their flocks and dairy produce, to help feed the army, and in particular a Gileadite chief called Barzillai was profuse in his offerings. He was an old man of eighty, still very robust and active, and he presented himself every day before the king to find out if anything in particular was needed. The house of one of the most important citizens was taken over for Bathsheba and the women, and David was accommodated not far off.

Meanwhile Joab had been organizing and exercising his men, hearing the reports of the scouts, and holding council with his officers. The day came when he went to David with the news that Absalom was now in the near neighborhood; he proposed that the army should go out to meet him in three divisions, under Abishai, Ittai, and himself, while David remained in the city with a body of reserves.

"Do as you think best," said the king, listlessly. Joab told him they would start in the morning, and left him.

During these days of preparation under the able generalship of Joab, David had quite recovered from the panic into which he had fallen on first receiving the unexpected news of rebellion. He

now felt that as far as his person and his throne were concerned he was secure, for he was positive that Absalom and Amasa, with their untrained levies, would be quite unable to get the better of his veterans, commanded as they were by the sons of Zeruiah. His fears now were all on the other side. Poor Absalom! What would become of him? He might be killed in the battle—he might be taken prisoner and killed in cold blood. . . . He did not know how to face these possibilities, and brooded over them despairingly, till he could think of nothing else. Joab's schemes, his own part in the conflict, the safety of Mahanaim and the loyalist party, were matters of indifference to him—he cared only to secure, in one way or another, the life of Absalom.

By sunrise the army was marshaled outside the south gate, and David came out to see them start. During the long sleepless hours of the night he had thought of a way—a chance, at least, of saving his son—after all why should he not be made prisoner and brought back for judgment? Surely it might be managed. Why not?

When he reached the troops he sent for Joab.

"You have three divisions, have n't you?" he asked, "make them march out past me with their captains—and place the captains on this side, so that they 'll come near me as they go."

Joab shrugged his shoulders, but told Abishai and Ittai, and then went to give the orders to his own division. After all it did n't much matter how they marched—David's way would do as well as another, and the main thing was for them to start soon.

The march past began—Joab thought David was saying something to each captain that went by—some good wish, he supposed, for the favor of Yahweh. Then a young man came running, with word that the king wished to speak to Joab, Abishai, and Ittai. Joab was vexed at being taken away from his supervision of the men, and went along growling to himself. Abishai and Ittai came up just as he did, and suddenly the king called out in a ringing voice, that must have reached the ears of many of the soldiers:

"Listen to my command, sons of Zeruiah and Ittai the Gittite. For my sake deal gently with Absalom—let no one touch him to hurt him."

Joab bit his lip in anger.

"What folly is this?" he thought to himself. "So this is the rubbish for which he has been altering our marching order and keeping us running to and fro like slaves . . . *Deal gently with Absalom!* If only I get a chance of dealing with him! . . ."

It was not likely that any news of the battle would reach Mahanaim before evening, yet all day long the king sat by the gate. There were two gates, an outer and an inner, with a small enclosure between them lined with stone benches. Above the enclosure there was a little room for the watchman, the roof of which was on a level with the city wall. David's restless anxiety kept him wandering around the gatehouse—sometimes sitting on one of the benches, sometimes climbing to the room above the gate, sometimes walking along the wall, waiting and wondering in an agony of apprehension.

The shadows were beginning to lengthen when, worn out by his agitation, he sat down in the enclosure and fell asleep. The voice of the watchman woke him with a start.

"Look! look! A man running alone!"

"Alone!" cried David; "then he is a messenger —if he were a fugitive there would be others."

"He comes nearer and nearer," called down the watchman; and then, suddenly, "Another man running alone!"

"Another messenger!"—David jumped up and went to the gate, but the runners were still too far off for him to distinguish them clearly. Presently the watchman called down again:

"I think by his running the first man is Ahimaaz, son of Zadok."

"He is a good man," muttered David to himself, "and doubtless brings good news"; and he leant up against the gate and waited.

In another moment Ahimaaz was within hail; he recognized the king and, touching his head, called out: "Peace be with you!"

David felt he could not speak—something was clutching his throat. Ahimaaz was now quite near; he bowed to the ground and said:

"Blessed be Yahweh, God of Israel, who delivered into our hands those who fought against the king."

"It is a victory," David thought; and at last managed to speak:

"Is Absalom safe?"

Why did not Ahimaaz answer? Why was he looking at him so strangely? Why did he hang his head and answer in such a different voice.

"When I left Joab, fighting was still going on—I 'm not sure."

"Well," said David with a sigh, "wait here in the gateway," and he turned to the second messenger who had just come up. This man was a negro, a slave of Joab's whom he had specially trained as a runner. He did obeisance and spoke:

"Good news. Yahweh has to-day done vengeance on all who rose against you."

Again David asked his one question:

"Is Absalom safe?"

The negro kissed the ground at the king's feet before he answered:

"May the king's enemies and all who rise against you be as that young man is."

Dead! It was the long-expected end to the dreary hours, not the less overwhelming for having been expected. He turned blindly away, and crept up the stairs to the little room above the gate, crying and moaning as he went . . . "O my son Absalom, my son, my son Absalom . . . would God I had died for thee! . . . O Absalom, my son, my son. . . ."

In about an hour the first groups of the victorious army began to return. They swung along, singing, laughing, and triumphant, all ready for the joyful welcome they were expecting. In the gateway sat Ahimaaz with a face of such desolation that one or two of the men asked what ailed him. He pointed upward; and from the watchman's room they heard the wail of despair:

"O my son Absalom. . . . O Absalom my son . . . my son. . . ."

This was a sorry welcome . . . they looked at each other with guilty eyes; their songs and laughter were silenced, and they crept quietly to their quarters. The news of David's grief soon spread among all the returning soldiers, and they stole back into the city without a sound—part sympathizing with the father's sorrow, part afraid of the king's displeasure, part resentful at his indifference to their triumph. At last Joab heard of what was going on. He was not far from Mahanaim at the time, but he pushed on as quickly as he could and, reaching the gate, strode up to the room where the king was. He lay on the ground on his face, still sobbing, still ejaculating his son's name, oblivious of all else.

Joab caught him by the shoulder and pulled him roughly around.

"So this is the thanks we get," he said bitterly, "for saving your life and the lives of your women and children—you make it clear to every one that if Absalom had lived and we had all been killed you would have been well pleased—you love those that hate you, and hate those that love you."

David was silent. At last he raised his head and said feebly: "What do you want?"

"I want this," answered Joab, "and mind, if you don't do it, the worst will happen that you 've had

yet—I want you to get up and go out to the soldiers and speak cheerfully to them—enter into their victory—thank them for what they 've done—I swear by the Lord that if you don't not one man will stay with you through the night."

"Very well." David slowly began to rise from the ground. Joab put out his hand to help him, and baring his arm showed a streak of dry blood stretching from his wrist to his elbow. David's eyes dilated; he shuddered violently and shrank away from his nephew. He staggered to his feet, and crept down the staircase alone, to sit all through the night in the gateway and rejoice with the soldiers over the glorious victory. Joab stood motionless in the empty room and looked at the blood on his arm.

Chapter VIII

In spite of the fact that Absalom was dead, and the rebellion had thus lost at a blow its reason and its leader, many negotiations had to be entered into before David could return safely to Jerusalem. Israel was in a ferment, the smaller men on the whole wishing to recall the king, while some of

the more important chiefs felt that the occasion was propitious for shaking off the overlordship of a man from Judah. A few well-chosen messages, and the gracious reception of a deputation from the Northern tribes soon weighted the balance in David's favor, and it became apparent that his return would be well received by them. To the men of Judah he sent special envoys in the persons of Abiathar and Zadok, pointing out that he had already received advances from the Israelites, reminding them of his relationship to themselves and claiming that his own flesh and blood ought to be his best and dearest support. There was no word of punishment or disgrace. Amasa, indeed, was actually offered the command of the army in the place of his cousin Joab. This, David explained to the council of officers, was essential to his whole scheme of diplomacy . . . and the announcement was received in dead silence—not a man ventured to protest.

The conduct of these negotiations was David's great resource; during the weeks succeeding the battle in the forest of Ephraim he toiled at them with unremitting energy, trying desperately to heal his wounds—or at least forget them for some hours every day.

At last his work drew to a successful conclusion; the chiefs of Judah sent, begging him to reurn with

his household, and informing him that they would themselves go down to the ford of Gilgal to meet him. The departure from Mahanaim was therefore arranged, and Barzillai at his own special request accompanied the king as far as the Jordan with two of his sons and a small guard of honor.

And so David started out for his triumphal return to Jerusalem. Again it had been shown that he was the special favorite of Yahweh, his enemies had been destroyed, his kingdom was consolidated, and all his ambitions were satisfied—why was it that success had the bitter taste of defeat?

On the third day they arrived at the bank of the Jordan. On the other side was a camp—obviously the tents of the chiefs of Judah. Ziba suddenly rushed down the slope of the opposite bank, jumped into a boat which he seemed to have procured, and was soon busily occupied in ferrying across those of the king's household who disliked the idea of wetting their feet—Bathsheba was the first to be taken over. David noticed a tall, lean, naked figure on the western bank; he turned, and saw Abishai beside him.

"Ah, Abishai," said David, "look at that man; is he not the wild Benjamite who cursed us as we left Jerusalem?"

"It is like him, certainly," answered Abishai,

"but I wonder he has the audacity to appear before us."

At this moment Barzillai approached the king and asked him to cross—Chimham his son was there ready to lead his ass through the water. David came forward, and in another moment was making his way over the river. As he came near the landing stage Shimei—for he it was—rushed forward and made an obeisance. He then jumped up again and began shouting in his fierce, hoarse voice:

"Do not be angry with me, O king, do not remember against me what I did on the day you left Jerusalem. I was wrong—I did wrong that day, and to-day I am the first of the house of Joseph to come down and welcome the king."

By this time David had landed, and Abishai, who had crossed beside him, spoke before he could answer.

"Let me put the old villain to death—did n't he curse the Lord's anointed?"

David had an access of irritation.

"Leave me alone," he said sharply; "you sons of Zeruiah are too ready to kill, and I say that to-day no man shall be put to death in Israel. Do you hear, Shimei? You shall not die; I swear it by the life of Yahweh."

At this moment Barzillai came up to take leave of the king, and Daivd, who had grown attached to him, looked at him with regret.

"Must you leave me?" he said with a tinge of sadness. "Come over with me and let me show you hospitality in Jerusalem as you did to me in Mahanaim."

Barzillai touched his head and his breast.

"I am too old to make a new home," he answered, "and I am too old to enjoy your delicacies and ceremonies—your food and drink and your singing men and women. I should only be a burden to you; let me go back to Gilead. But here is my son Chimham—he would delight in your novelties and might be of some service to you—let him go with you instead of me."

"Chimham shall come," answered the king, "and if at any time I can be of service to you send me word." Barzillai touched his head again, embraced his son, and returned across the Jordan.

By this time the chiefs of Judah were ready to claim the king, coming eagerly forward, making obeisance, welcoming him back, invoking the blessing of Yahweh. In the midst of these rejoicings a tumult was heard and a band of Israelites pushed their way forward. They were evidently heated with a hurried journey, and were, besides, full of

grievances. One of them in particular, a Benjamite, Sheba, the son of Bichri, could hardly contain himself enough to salute the king.

"What is the matter, Sheba?" David asked. By this time he was beginning to feel worn out. He was sure by the look of things that there was going to be a dispute between the tribesmen, and though he knew he ought to avert it he was afraid he was not equal to the occasion.

"We want to know how it comes about that only the men of Judah have been given the opportunity of coming to receive the king? Are not *all* David's men his people?"

"Certainly," answered David; "no slight is intended to the Israelites. . . ."

"And yet," called out a chief from near Bethlehem, "it is but right that we should be more favored, for the king is of our tribe."

"Yes," shouted another from Hebron, "but what advantage have we received from that? Do we eat more often than you at the king's table? Or do we receive gifts from him?"

Sheba shrugged his shoulders.

"But *I* say that we of the North should have *ten* parts in the king, and I say that we are the firstborn—and I say that it is we who spoke first of bringing back the king. . . ."

By this time David was feeling quite exhausted. He beckoned to one of the men of Judah, and leaning on his arm made his way to a tent, and sat down to recover. He heard the voices of the disputants growing shriller and more unreasonable, until suddenly there was a sound of a trumpet. Then Sheba's voice rang out—he was too far away for the king to hear all he said, but he caught the words "nothing . . . David . . . son of Jesse" and then a roar "to your tents, O Israel." Then there was a sound of running feet, and a clatter of asses' hoofs. . . . David leant back and shut his eyes.

"So now the Israelites are in rebellion . . ." he thought.

Chapter IX

At any rate, the men of Judah were loyal enough. The return to Jerusalem the next day was made by them into a triumphal procession; even the wearisome journey through the wilderness was alleviated by a constant supply of asses and plenty of skins of wine and water. When they reached the top of the Mount of Olives, Jerusalem lay at

their feet and was near enough for them to see that it was gaily decorated with green boughs and gaily colored stuffs in honor of the king's return. Soon the inhabitants came streaming out to meet him, shouting and singing, clapping their hands and waving their branches, and crying out as they came:

"Blessed is the king of Israel . . . blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord. . . ."

They had hardly crossed the Kedron when amongst the rejoicing crowd a pathetic figure came into sight. It was Meribaal, riding an ass, his clothes in disorder, his beard uncared for. David heard the people round him murmuring that he had not changed his clothes, but had lived like a mourner all the time that the king had been away. Was this possible? Had not Ziba said he too was a traitor? David looked up, his heart like lead. It was in Jerusalem that he had last seen his beautiful Absalom—and Absalom, strong, fearless, heroic, was dead, while Meribaal, a useless cripple, was alive. . . . He heard Meribaal's greetings with a deaf ear, and when they were over said in a voice of icy coldness:

"Why did you not come with me, Meribaal?"

"I meant to come, my lord, but my servant Ziba deceived me. He took my ass that I had meant to

ride on because of my lameness, and I was left helpless. And he slandered me to you. . . ."

As Meribaal looked at the king he began to shiver. Something terrible had evidently happened, and it was no use going on—if only David would believe he *could* not have been his enemy. . . . He made a gesture of resignation.

"The king is an angel of God. Do what seems good to you. For when all my father's house were dead you brought me into your own house and to your own table. Why should I ask any more from the king? . . ."

Meribaal's words were an agony to listen to. David, it seemed, had been mistaken—Ziba was a liar, and Meribaal was faithful. Meribaal, the wretched cripple, was faithful, and the beautiful, splendid dead Absalom was a traitor. . . . He could endure it no longer.

"Why do you go on tormenting me about your affairs? . . . You and Ziba can divide the land between you."

Meribaal's smile made him strangely like Jonathan, and it seemed as if it were Jonathan's voice ringing in David's ear as he passed through the city gate.

"Yes, let him take all, since the king is returned in peace. . . ."

The king, however, was not returned in peace, and his first action on reaching his palace was to send for Amasa. Before Amasa arrived he was informed of Absalom's treatment of the women who had been left behind.

"They are widows," said David, coldly; "give them a house and see that they are provided for. Now, Amasa, you are to take command of the tribes. Sheba, the son of Bichri, a Benjamite, has raised a revolt. I give you three days to collect the fighting men here in Jerusalem, and to put yourself at their head. In cases like this speedy action is essential."

But Amasa, it seemed, was a man to whom speed was impossible. The three days passed and there was no news of him or his army, and on the evening of the fourth day David sent for Abishai.

"This cousin of yours is an incompetent young fool," he began abruptly. "If there is much more delay over it Sheba will do us more harm than ever Absalom did."

Abishai agreed.

"Well, then, you must take the guard and go after him—start to-morrow."

"But, David, I can't—why don't you send for Joab?"

"Can't? What nonsense, Abishai! The great

thing is to catch Sheba, before he gets into a fortress —that will mean a long and expensive siege and all sorts of troubles. It is all a question of rapid movement and you can manage as well as another."

If it reached David's ears the next day that Joab as well as Abishai had gone with the guard he said nothing. Amasa, perhaps hearing that his rival cousins had after all started against the rebels first, made a desperate effort, and on the evening of the same day reported himself as ready. David shrugged his shoulders and told him to go, but he knew already that Amasa was doomed. Amasa was weak and slow and had the post that Joab thought should be his. It could only be a question of time, and when in two or three days rumors reached the city of Amasa's death—his murder by Joab—treacherously, with a kiss—the king at least made no comment. He had long known that Joab was a man of blood, and there was blood upon him already that made David shudder at his approach. He saw, however, that he would have to allow his approach. The defeat of Sheba—Abishai would inevitably yield the command to his more determined brother—would replace him at the head of the army from which David had hoped for a moment to eject him. Joab's triumphant return, his dramatic throwing of Sheba's head at the king's

feet, were to him a foregone conclusion. He watched the man he hated, with dulled, weary eyes, and submitted without another effort to his odious presence.

Chapter X

For many years David had had an idea which he had never quite dared to put into force. It had for long seemed inconvenient to him not to know how many men there were in each tribe. He had a rough idea, but after each war the numbers varied and he had no way of checking them. If he wanted soldiers or money from any district the chiefs had only to send a message saying, "There are no men," and he could go no further; while he was constantly in danger of committing injustice, by taking too many men from one place and too few from another. Now if he only had the exact figures of every tribe, how convenient it would be! The difficulty was that there would be an immediate outcry against it. Everybody knew how dangerous it was to count anything—no farmer knew how many sheep he had, no woman the number of her chickens, parents even avoided enumerating their children, and for a

king to number his people would lay them all open to unknown perils. The jealousy of Yahweh would certainly be aroused and would not so easily be appeased. And so in the end David had never brought himself to insist on it. Now, after his return to Jerusalem, and the successful suppression of two revolts, in which many of the tribesmen had perished, he resolved at last that it should be done.

"Joab," he said one morning, after a night of screwing up his resolution, "Joab, I have a command for you."

Joab bowed and waited.

"You are to go from Dan to Beersheba, and number the people in every tribe, and bring the numbers to me."

Joab could not believe his ears.

"Number them?" he stammered.

"That is what I said. You are to find the whole number in each tribe, and besides that the number of fighting men in each tribe." Those figures, David thought to himself, will be useful for any kind of levy—men or money.

By this time Joab had recovered himself.

"May Yahweh increase the people a hundred times, and may your own eyes see it," he said with fervor; "but why should you wish to do such a

thing? Are they not all your servants, however many they are?"

Joab's opposition was apt to enrage the king.

"If *you* are my servant, obey my orders." he said, and Joab was silenced. The census took a long time. Joab began on the eastern bank of the Jordan and worked north, then he crossed the valley at Dan and came south. It was over nine months before he reappeared at Jerusalem, and David had had plenty of time to feel uncomfortable about it. There had been a great deal of gossip over this extraordinary action of the king's, and Gad in particular had told him over and over again that Yahweh was angry with him, and would soon punish him for his pride. When Joab at last came up with the numbers David told him shortly to give them to the scribe, and, rather to Joab's vexation, said nothing more. That very night David had a violent revulsion of feeling, and wished he had never thought of anything so foolish.

In the morning reports began to reach him of plague in the Northern villages; as the day wore on and it became evident that a serious epidemic was sweeping over the country, a sort of horror came over the king. He sent for Gad, and asked him what it meant.

"As I warned you, Yahweh is angry. There

were three punishments in his hand—three years' famine, three months' invasion, or three days' pestilence—will you choose the pestilence?"

"I suppose so," said David, with a groan, "let me fall into the hand of Yahweh, rather than into the hand of man."

For the remainder of the day David was obsessed by this dreadful idea of a pestilence raging over the whole country. Soon it would be ravaging Jerusalem—who knew how many would be left alive when all was over? He sent out messengers in every dirction with orders that they were to return to him immediately with news of how the disease was spreading. He gave instructions to the doorkeeper to send the messengers to him at whatever hour of the day or night they returned. As the evening drew on the messages became somewhat less alarming, but David would not sleep—he sat all night alone in case more news should come. One or two of the men he had sent out did bring reports, and they were reassuring. He sat motionless, drowsy, but not sleeping; suddenly there flashed into his mind the picture he had seen from the Kedron valley on the day of his flight from Absalom—the whole city of Jerusalem white and glittering in the sun, the hill of Moriah above it with the Jebusite's green fields and farm on the

slope. He opened his eyes and looked out. The dawn was near. The thought of the fresh open air attracted him and the vision of Moriah called him irresistibly. Twisting something warm around him, he went out, down through the streets, through the gate, down, and still down to the valley of the Kedron. As he went his thoughts were all full of the danger of the city—the royal city—David's own city; was there nothing he could do to avert it, he who was called the beloved of Yahweh?

By the brook he stopped, and looked up. As he did so a crimson line seemed to rush through the sky behind Moriah—it was like a flash, so bright, so clear, so swift.

"The flash of a sword," thought David. "Can it be the sword of the angel of Yahweh?" and as he gazed, and wondered if the sword would fall, the whole sky broke into blue and gold—the sun had risen.

When David got back to his palace he experienced the same reaction of delight after anxiety that he had known so often in his adventurous youth. All the news that awaited him was good—the pestilence was clearly not coming further south than Bethel—Jerusalem was saved. He sent for Gad, and told him how he had seen the angel of Yahweh stretch out his sword over the city and sheathe it

again at the command of Yahweh. And Gad was ready with a suggestion:

"You ought to make an altar to Yahweh on the place where the angel stood."

David was enchanted with the idea.

"It is the threshing place of Araunah the Jebusite," he said. "I will go up at once and buy the place from him."

Araunah, it appeared, was only too pleased to let him have the place, and with the usual politeness of one who is selling, begged the king to take it as a gift, together with the threshing instruments to burn, and the oxen for a burnt sacrifice.

"No," answered David, smiling, "I will buy it at a price; for I will not offer to Yahweh, my God, a burnt sacrifice which cost me nothing."

Chapter XI

David was not well. For several days he had been increasingly irritable, and his servants noticed that once or twice as he walked he had seemed to sway, and had caught hold of some one, as if to prevent himself from falling. At last Bathsheba asked him if he was feeling ill, and he admitted that he

had been suffering from a headache for some time. "But that," said he rather crossly, "is only because I can't sleep."

After a little persuasion he agreed that he would not see his counselors for a day or two, and a bed was prepared for him in an inner room, away from the business and noise of the palace. He went to lie down, and presently began to abuse his attendants for not giving him enough wraps.

"What are you thinking of?" he cried, angrily, "on a cold day like this to give me nothing but that miserable covering!"

The servants ran for more rugs, shaking their heads to each other; it was a pleasant day in June —the king must indeed be ill to think it cold.

After this he made no attempt to get up and return to the affairs of state. He sent for Nathan and told him that if anything of importance happened he was to be informed—but Joab was not to come near him. He spoke in a breathless voice, interrupted by fits of coughing, and Nathan shook his head as he left the room. He thought things looked very bad—David was an old man.

When Bathsheba came to see him she saw at once that he was not comfortable, and made the servants arrange the cushions so that they propped him up, and somewhat eased his difficult breathing.

In reply to his look of gratitude she turned her head quickly away, and then asked gently if there was anything else he wanted.

"I 'm so cold, Bathsheba . . . can't you do anything to give me a little warmth? . . . It 's miserable to be so cold. . . ."

"Of course I can give you warmth—trust to me, I will see to it." She turned away, leaving him a little comforted.

Meanwhile, outside that dark, quiet room, the household was in a tumult. The king was dying —it was obvious he would never recover from this illness—and already the main interest of the onlookers lay in the question of who would succeed him. Adonijah, said some, the eldest surviving son, as handsome as Absalom—oh, nonsense! cried the other party, you 've forgotten Absalom—and as great a favorite with his father, who has never crossed him. Solomon, said the others, the son of the favorite—oh, but don't you remember the scandal there was about her?—he 's the cleverest of the king's sons, and his mother has the king's ear.

Bathsheba's remedy for David's sufferings from cold was to supply contact with a warm and vigorous body. She found a pretty girl called Abishag from Shunem, a village in the north, and sent her

in to him. The remedy was a good one; for a time at least the old man got a little comfort.

The outside world drifted away from him. Abiathar, the high priest, came in to see him, but he spoke of things that seemed infinitely remote. David's thoughts circled round the days that were long past—the heroic days when he had been triumphant in battle, when he was stronger and cleverer and braver than any one else, when even the king was afraid of him, and the Philistines ran away from him. He began to tell Abishag about it, coughing painfully between the sentences.

"And there were only four hundred of us—thousands and thousands of Philistines—but they ran like sheep. . . ."

Abishag was delighted at these reminiscences, which had already reached her in a more or less legendary form.

"Oh yes! And the giant! Didn't my lord kill a giant?"

"To be sure I did—let me see—what was his name, now . . . ?"

"Was it Goliath?"

"Goliath! yes, that was it. Oh yes, King Saul was there, and Jonathan, and Abner . . . they were all there . . . and Saul had his bronze armor . . . and Goliath came out down the hill with a huge

shield and a spear and a sword . . . and I went to the brook and picked out five stones—nice smooth stones—and slung them . . . and that's how I killed the giant. . . ." A burst of coughing ended the tale.

Alas, poor David! While you enjoy these last pleasures of memory, events are taking place which will oblige you to turn once more from the golden past to the bleak present—once more, before time and space, in the ultimate moments of existence, begin to recede toward infinity. . . .

The sounds of armed men in the palace and in the streets could not penetrate to the dying man's ear, nor was he aware of whispered consultations in the room beyond his. At last Bathsheba came in, and instead of coming up to him where he lay, made an obeisance.

"What is it?" said the king. "What do you want?"

Bathsheba came nearer, and he thought, vaguely, that she looked agitated.

"Did you not swear by the life of Yahweh that Solomon should be king?"

"Did I? . . . I dare say—I don't remember. . ."

"But now Adonijah has made himself king without your knowledge. He has had a great feast,

and Abiathar and Joab have been summoned, but not Solomon. And I am afraid lest when—if you . . . get worse . . . Solomon and I shall be ruined. . . ."

"Adonijah king, did you say?"

At that moment an attendant appeared to say that Nathan begged to be admitted into the king's presence.

"About this, I suppose. Well, I must settle it. Stay in the next room, Bathsheba, I shall want you. Nathan, what is this I hear?"

"My lord, I have come to ask if it is by your orders that Adonijah is proclaimed king. He has made sacrifices, and called Joab and Abiathar and the princes to them, but he has not sent for Solomon, or Zadok the priest, or Benaiah, or myself. Is this by the king's order, and was it of set purpose that we were told nothing of your intentions as regards the succession?"

"Of course not. Go and fetch Zadok and Benaiah and come back to me." There was clearly a lot to be done, and David felt he must husband all his strength to be able to do it. "Call Bathsheba to me."

She came in and stood beside him, her still beautiful eyes fixed anxiously on his face. He tried to speak, but was cut short by a terrible fit

of coughing, and it was a long time before he recovered his voice.

"Listen, Bathsheba. As Yahweh lives and as I have sworn to you by Yahweh, God of Israel, Solomon your son shall reign after me, and shall sit on my throne in my stead."

He sank back exhausted.

"May David the king live forever!" she cried; and hearing the approach of the counselors hurried away.

"Give me something to drink," whispered David, "and push these cushions up behind me . . . ah, that is better . . . show them in." His voice grew stronger and again he seemed master of himself.

"There is no time to lose," he said, as the officers entered. "Take the household servants and guards, and put Solomon on my own mule and take him to —yes, the sanctuary of Gihon will do, it is near. Zadok and Nathan are to anoint him king of Israel, and you, Benaiah, will cause the trumpet to be blown, and will make them shout, "God save King Solomon." Then bring him back and let him sit on the throne; for he is to be king after me."

Benaiah stepped forward, his face red with excitement.

"So be it! so be it!" he cried, "and may Yahweh, the king's god, say so too! And as Yahweh

has been with the king, so may he be with Solomon, and make Solomon's throne greater than David's!"

"Be quiet! Come away!" whispered Zadok and Nathan, pulling Benaiah out of the room, "don't make such a noise . . . the poor old man can't stand it. . . ."

While waiting for a report of the proclamation David was very restless; his breathing was beginning to get stertorous. It seemed an endless time before Zadok came in with the news that all had gone off well, and David whispered that Solomon was to come in to him. It was not long before the young king entered and came to the sick-bed. David looked at him and put his hand on his head, saying:

"Blessed be Yahweh, God of Israel, who has given a king to sit on my throne while I still live to see it. . . . Now, Solomon, listen; I have something important to say . . . two things. First . . . Joab . . . Joab the son of Zeruiah. He killed Abner . . . and Amasa . . . and . . . and I don't remember . . . there was some one else . . . well, never mind—he is a bloodthirsty man . . . be wise, and put him to death. . . . Who was the other? . . . who was it? another bloodthirsty man . . . yes, yes, Shimei, the son of Gera; he is a Benjamite and hates us for the sake of the house of Saul . . .

he came down from Bahurim cursing me and throwing stones when I was escaping to Mahanaim, and on the way back I promised to spare him . . . be wise, Solomon, and put him to death. . . ." The coughing again choked any further utterance.

That night Solomon was told that his father was worse. He went in and found him leaning forward on his elbows, gasping, his face purple and swollen. They had been much alarmed, the servant said, because a little while ago his breathing had seemed to stop . . . but he had got better again . . . they were much afraid of another attack of coughing. As he spoke the attack began. The old, weak body seemed to be fighting for breath, while they held him on each side, helping to support him. All at once, in the middle of a paroxysm, he fell forward on his face. The coughing and gasping stopped—there was a silence. The servants hurriedly lifted him up and laid him back on his cushions. They looked at him, and then, without speaking, at Solomon; David the son of Jesse, king of Judah and Israel, was dead.

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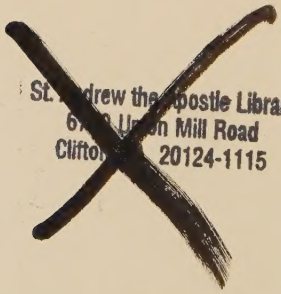

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